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BEAUMARCHAIS

AND HIS TIMES.

BEAUMARCHAIS

AND HIS TIMES.

SKETCHES OF FRENCH SOCIETY

IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

FROM UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTS.

BY

LOUIS DE LOMÉNIE.

TRANSLATED BY HENRY S. EDWARDS.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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BEAUMARCHAIS AND HIS TIMES.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CONSPIRACY AGAINST "THE BARBER."—PAYMENT OF DRAMATIC WORKS.—CORNEILLE'S PRICES.—ACTORS AND AUTHORS.—A LESSON IN BOOK-KEEPING.—A DINNER AT BEAUMARCHAIS'.—SUSCEPTIBILITY OF THE GUESTS.—PROLONGED DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AUTHORS AND ACTORS.

During the first thirty representations of "The Barber of Seville," Beaumarchais lived on the best terms with the actors of the Comédie-Française; there was one continued interchange of *billets-doux* between them.

"As long as it pleases you, gentlemen," he writes, "to give 'The Barber of Seville,' I shall endure it with resignation. And may the theatre be bursting with spectators, for I am the friend of your success, and the lover of my own. If the public is satisfied, if you are, I shall be the same. I wish I could say as much of the 'Journal de Bouillon;'* but you may

* An allusion to the criticisms of a sheet to which Beaumarchais replied in detail in the preface to "The Barber."

show the piece off to the greatest advantage, and play it like angels: you must do without its support; it is impossible to please every one.

"I am, gentlemen, with gratitude, your very humble, &c."

To these compliments are sometimes, however, added a few critical remarks, called forth by the paternal love of the author for his piece; thus Beaumarchais writes as follows to the Secretary of the Comédie-Française:—

"M. de Beaumarchais has the honour to inform his old friend, M. de la Porte, that he has begged, and that he begs the Comédie-Française, either not to give "The Barber," or to cut out the scene of the sneezing, or to induce M. Dugazon not to give up the little part which is amusing or disgusting, according to whether it is well or ill rendered. M. Dugazon is begged to arrange the sublime sallies of this part, that is to say, the sneezes, so that what the doctor says in this scene may be heard, for those are not the worst things which have been put into his mouth."

This note has a certain significance, when we remember the scene to which the author is here alluding. It appears that Dugazon, in playing the part of the old valet, La Jeunesse, had a manner of sneezing which excited the prolonged laughter of the pit; and as this success amused the actor also, he used to overdo the sneezing to such an extent, that Bartholo's words in the discussion with his valet in the second act were no longer heard. Now it just happened that Beaumarchais had placed in the doctor's mouth that sati-

rical tirade on *reason, justice, and authority,* which we have already quoted, and in which he gives full scope to his sarcastic wit. In a word, it was the shade of opposition, as already indicated in "The Barber," which Beaumarchais did not wish to have weakened.

The attention of the author of "The Barber" was soon attracted to another point; he thought he perceived that the actors were endeavouring to make his piece fail, in order to confiscate it to their profit, by virtue of a law of which we are about to treat, and he accordingly addressed to them the following unpublished letter:—

"Paris, December 20, 1775.

"In writing to me, gentlemen, that 'The Barber had been requested for Saturday next, you forget to add that, on the same day the 'Connétable de Bourbon'* was given at the court. As this is the second time that a like request, accompanied by a like omission, has nearly made this poor devil of a 'Barber' run the risk of an equivocal representation, or of falling (criticism apart) *within the rules,*† I have the honour to inform you that on a similar remark, the first time, all the theatres agreed that, without admitting the principle, it was possible I was right that time, and the piece was not played the same day as the 'Connétable.' I beg, then, gentlemen, that the same may be the case on this

* A tragedy by Guibert, the author of "La Tactique."

† A double allusion to a phrase of Beaumarchais, in his Memorial against Madame Goëzman, and to a particular arrangement in the old laws of the Theatre-Français.

second occasion. In proportion as I shall be grateful every time that on a good day, in a good season, the theatre does me the honour to slip my piece into the *répertoire*, so should I think myself entitled to complain if it never remembered 'The Barber,' except in order to close a gap, in which it might run the chance of being swallowed up alive, to the great detriment of its existence and my interests.

"Any good day, except Saturday, December 23, 1775, the day the 'Connétable' is played at Versailles, you will do me the greatest pleasure by satisfying with 'The Barber,' the curiosity of a small number of admirers. For that day only it will be easy for you to make them understand the importance of my excuses as acknowledged by all the theatre.

"I have the honour to be, with consideration, esteem, friendship, &c.

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

"On reading my letter again, I have reflected that the company may be in some perplexity about Saturday, as all the tragic actors are at Versailles. If that be the reason which caused me to be written to, why not simply state the facts? The same man who appears strict and rigorous in treating on business affairs, is often the most ready to oblige his friends.

"Let the company write to me that I have guessed right, and that it does not intend to turn the result of the representation against myself, if it be meagre or unfortunate, and I will agree to run the chance of next Saturday. I should be sorry for the Comédie-Française to have the slightest occasion for complaining of me, who hope to have always to speak in its favour.

"An answer if you please."

The object of this letter was to prevent the application to himself of one of the oddest articles in the

somewhat strange code which then regulated the relations of dramatic authors with the Théâtre-Français, with regard to the division of the proceeds from the works represented. Every piece, the receipts of which descended only once below a certain figure, was said to be *within the rules*, and became thenceforth the exclusive property of the actors, who could play it anew with great success without having to render any account to the author. To this abuse were joined several others, which were not less injurious to the authors, and which had long been the source of great irritation on their part towards the actors of a theatre which was alone privileged to play both tragedy and comedy.

The richest of the dramatic authors, Beaumarchais, to whom the stage had never been more than an amusement, and who had made a present to the actors of his two first works, could not be taxed with cupidity in taking the cause of his fellow authors in hand. This point determined him to do so. We shall see him now defending, for the first time, the interests of others, even more than his own, running the chance of a new conflict against adversaries, who were more difficult to vanquish than all those with whom he had hitherto fought; he will conquer, nevertheless, but he will require many years, and the support of the Revolution, before he will be able to overcome theatrical kings and queens, repress the cupidity of

the directors and speculators of the stage, and have the independence and rights of the authors, who have been unjustly spoliated, fully recognised. Until the end of his life he will not cease to plead with warmth, in order to procure the law's protection for a kind of property not less inviolable than all others, and which before his time had been completely sacrificed.

The Society of Dramatic Authors, which is at present so powerful, so strongly organised, and which is sometimes accused, wrongly or rightly, with having replaced the former tyranny of theatrical managers and actors by a tyranny of an opposite kind, the Society of Dramatic Authors does not perhaps know very exactly all it owes to the man who first united in a body writers who had hitherto remained isolated, and who was the first to strive energetically for insuring to them the rights they at present enjoy. In order to make all the opposition which Beaumarchais had to surmount, intelligible, we must first of all explain what the authors' rights were before the Revolution, and afterwards trace the picture of this conflict by means of new documents, which will allow us to represent persons and things in their true light.

At the commencement of the dramatic art in France, as everywhere, the composition of a theatrical piece had no importance; the piece existed in some

sort only through the representation. In the middle ages, the authors of the "Mysteries" and "Soties" worked gratis, or for the smallest salary, or themselves formed part of the company. The most prolific dramatic author of the beginning of the seventeenth century, Hardy, is mentioned by several writers as having been the first to obtain a profit from his pieces; * but this profit was very slight, if we are to judge by the following remark of the actress Beaupré, as related by Ménage, in reference to the injury Corneille did to the actors, by introducing a rise in the price of dramatic works. "M. Corneille," said Mademoiselle Beaupré, "has done us a great injury: we had formerly dramatic pieces for three crowns, which were done for us in one night. People were accustomed to them, and we gained a great deal; at present, M. Corneille's pieces cost us a great deal, and we gain but little."

The tragic or comic productions of Hardy, then,

* This opinion, reproduced by M. Guizot in his work on Corneille, is not perhaps incontestably true. Amongst other objections, one might be found in the first edition of the comedies of Pierre Larivey, who lived more that twenty years before Hardy, and who, in a sonnet placed at the end of his preface, makes a friend pity him for not deriving as much money from his pieces as "Terence the Carthaginian;" which seems to indicate that he derived some. As for "Terence the Carthaginian," he was much better remunerated than Hardy and Larivey, since, if we are to believe Suetonius, his comedy of the "Eunuch," which used to be played twice in one day, brought him 8000 sestertii (about 64*l.*).

cost three crowns a piece. That was not very dear, but it must also be said that they were scarcely worth more.*

After Corneille's period, the actors began to pay rather more dearly for dramatic works; nevertheless, there was always a fixed price settled between the author and the actors, and a very trifling price too, and one which did not prevent the great Corneille from dying of hunger, or nearly so, and from being forced to have recourse to the painful trade of selling dedications to the highest bidder. † Quinault was, it appears, the first dramatic author from whom a piece was purchased by the actors in 1653, no longer for a fixed sum, but with the right of taking a ninth of the receipts it produced. This agreement, accepted by Quinault, was generally adopted by all the other authors, and sanctioned in 1697, by a regulation pro-

* The Spanish author, Lope de Vega, Hardy's contemporary, who is said to have composed, like him, eight hundred dramatic pieces, received for each of them 500 reals, that is to say, about 130 francs. It was a little more than three crowns; but it was still far from being equal to what is produced in the present day by the *répertoire* of a *vaudevilliste*.

† Thus, for 1000 pistoles, a speculator of the time, Montauron the tax-collector, purchased the honour of seeing himself compared to Augustus, and of going down to posterity with the tragedy of "Cinna." This is sad; but, on the other hand, this Montauron did things on a grand scale: 10,000 francs for a dedication! Richelieu had recoiled before the price, and there are not many tax-collectors, of the present day, who would give 10,000 francs for the honour of going down to posterity, for which they hardly care.

ceeding from royal authority. This regulation gave authors the ninth of the receipts for pieces in five acts, and the twelfth for pieces in three acts, after the payment of the daily expenses of the theatre, which were fixed at 500 livres during the winter, and 300 during the summer. It enacted very justly, that when, twice running, the amount of 500 and 300 livres was not reached, the actors should have the right of withdrawing the piece; but it was not said that in case of successful revival, the author should lose all right in his work.

The first regulation was in force up to 1757. At this period the French actors, who were much in debt, obtained from the king, not only a sum destined for the payment of their debts, but also the privilege of selling life-admissions to the play, which did not figure in the account furnished to the author. They moreover obtained the privilege of appropriating a piece as soon as its receipts fell on one single occasion, not below 500 livres during the winter, and 300 livres during the summer as before, but below 1200 livres in the winter, and 800 livres in the summer. They succeeded at last in establishing a custom of only accounting to the authors for the chance receipts at the doors, and of making no mention of all the other elements of the receipts, such as subscriptions and the money paid for boxes. They also deducted from the amount of these chance receipts the daily ex-

penses, which were put down at an arbitrary cost, and also kept back a quarter for the quarter devoted to the poor, which they paid by the year with a fixed sum three times less. Thanks to these ingenious calculations, when the piece had become their property, as not having produced receipts to the amount of 1200 livres, it had in fact produced more than 2000, and when it produced more than 1200 livres, the ninth part of the author was cut down by more than half. Sometimes even the accounts furnished by the theatre were characterised by a highly amusing originality. Thus, when in 1776, an author of the time, Lonvay de la Saussaye, had had a comedy in three acts, acted at the Théâtre-Français, under the title of "La Journée Lacédémonienne," and asked for his share of the receipts, an account was sent to him, in which, after having stated that the piece had produced 12,000 livres in five representations, the actors, under the pretence that extraordinary expenses had been incurred, concluded as follows: "According to his right of the twelfth part of the receipts of the *five* representations of his piece, the author *owes* the sum of 101 livres, 8 sous, 8 deniers to the theatre."

Such was the state of affairs in 1776. The authors being isolated and without influence, were completely at the mercy of a well-organised corporation of actors and actresses, which was directed in appearance by the four first gentlemen of the King's Chamber,

but in reality by itself alone; for amongst these four gentlemen, two alone, the Duke de Richelieu, and the Duke de Duras, paid some attention to their duty on account of certain pleasures connected with it, and which rendered them naturally very much disposed to decide in favour of the actors and actresses in opposition to the dramatic authors. We must add, that as the taste for theatrical pleasures became greater and greater, the Comédie-Française, thanks to its monopoly, had excellent receipts, and became every day more confirmed in the pleasant habit of appropriating authors' pieces, or reducing their profits by more than a half.

"One day," says Beaumarchais, "at a meeting of the actors, one of them asked me if it was my intention to give my piece ('The Barber of Seville') to the theatre, or to demand the author's rights for it. I replied, with a laugh like Sganarelle, 'I shall give it if I wish to give it, and I shall not give it if I don't wish to give it.' One of the principal actors persisted and said to me, 'If you do not give it, at least tell us how many times you wish it to be played for your benefit, so that it may belong to us afterwards.' 'What necessity is there, gentlemen, that it should belong to you at all?' 'A great many authors make this arrangement with us.' 'Such authors are inimitable.' 'They find their advantage in it, Sir; for if they get no further share in the profits of the work, at least they have the pleasure of seeing it oftener represented. The Comédie-Française always appreciates kindness shown towards it. Do you wish it to be played for your benefit six, eight, even ten times? Say.' There was something so gay about the proposition, that I replied in the same tone, 'Since you

permit it, I should like it to be played a thousand and one times for my benefit.' 'Sir, you are very modest.' 'As modest, gentlemen, as you are just. What is this madness you have for inheriting from persons who are not yet dead? As my piece cannot belong to you until it comes down to a very low receipt, you ought, on the contrary, to wish that it should never belong to you at all. Are not eight-ninths of a hundred louis worth more than nine-ninths of fifty? I see, gentlemen, that you like your own interests better than you understand them.' I bowed with a laugh to the assembly, which also smiled in its turn; for its orator had blushed a little."

This habit, on the part of the actors of the Théâtre-Français, of assuming authors' rights, was the cause of perpetual quarrels. Accordingly, many authors, such as Piron, Sedaine, and Collé, had ended by leaving the Théâtre-Français to devote themselves to the kind of work required by the Théâtre-Italien, which treated them much better.

In spite of his heedlessness, the Duke de Richelieu, fatigued by these contests, and looking upon Beaumarchais as a rich *littérateur*, more liked by the actors than by literary men, and consequently disposed to be impartial, had thought of inviting him to study the question, and to try to establish more satisfactory relations between the two parties. He had even authorised him to refer, with this view, to the books of the theatre; but, when he presented himself with the Marshal's letter, the actors indignantly refused the desired information, and declared

that the Duke de Richelieu had no more right than Beaumarchais to examine the account of their receipts.

Repulsed in his first step as a friendly arbitrator, the author of "The Barber of Seville" hesitated for some time about the very natural opportunity given to him by his rights over the proceeds of his piece, to commence the war in his own name. He was pleased with the actors; he had accustomed them to love him, and honour him, as an author who gave his works gratis. To ask them for an exact and precise account was to break with them, to break with agreeable actresses whose influence he felt, and whom it would have been more difficult to convince than a councillor of the Parliament; he was, moreover, exposing himself to unpleasant contests in favour of fellow writers, who would, perhaps, show but little gratitude for his zeal, above all, if it was not crowned with success. Let us add, that Beaumarchais had many other affairs which might have taken his attention away from this one; he was organising his American expedition, he was still pleading at Aix against M. de la Blache, he had only just finished his suit for the recovery of his civil rights. To make war at once upon the English, M. de la Blache, and the actors, was a great deal even for so warlike a man as himself.

However, as soon as it was known that he was

occupying himself with the interminable disputes between the Comédie-Française and the authors, several men of letters who had been ill-treated by the Theatre, had written to him upon the subject of their wrongs, and, confiding in his cleverness, had begged him to undertake their common cause. Thus, Sedaine, in a long Memorial addressed to Beaumarchais, and found among his papers, enumerates the wrongs he has suffered from the actors, and exhorts the author of "The Barber of Seville" to come to the assistance of his fellow authors.* Beaumarchais then was encouraged by the hope that he would do himself honour by freeing the dramatic authors from the oppression which weighed upon them. Perhaps, also, the difficulty of the enterprise, which almost every one looked upon as chimerical, was a spur to the man who was not averse to difficulties; at all events, after some hesitation he decided to commence a campaign against the actors. When "The Barber of Seville" had reached its thirty-second representation, he asked for an exact account of what was coming to him. Alarmed at this demand, the players sent to him the actor Desessarts, who was commissioned to sound his in-

* This unpublished Memorial of Sedaine's contains sufficiently interesting particulars, and especially a plan for reorganising the reading committee of the Théâtre-Français. We publish it entire in Appendix, No. 1.

tentions, and to take him 4506 livres, as representing his author's rights for the thirty-two representations of "The Barber."

"As no statement of accounts," says Beaumarchais, "was joined to these offers, I did not accept the money, although M. Desessarts pressed me to take it in the most polite manner in the world; for he had been strongly recommended to do so. 'There are a great many matters,' he said to me, 'with regard to which we can only offer the authors an *account badly made out.*' 'What I require from the Theatre, much more than money, is an account *well made out*, an exact reckoning, to serve as a type and model for all future reckonings, and to re-establish peace between the actors and the authors.' 'I see clearly,' he said, 'that you wish to commence a quarrel with the Theatre.' 'On the contrary, Sir, and may it please the god of verse, that I terminate all, to the equal advantage of each side!' He then took back his money."

Three days afterwards, Beaumarchais wrote to the actors for the regular account. At the end of a fortnight, he received merely a statement without signature. Beaumarchais sent it back, with a request that some one would sign it, and certify to its truth. "M. Desessarts," he writes, "who was a *procureur* before being one of the king's actors, will assure you that my request is reasonable." The Theatre replied that the account could only be certified as regarded the receipts at the door; that, as for the other parts of the receipts, they could only give an account from approximation; and here they left back

on their favourite resource—*an account badly made out*. Beaumarchais replied to the actors in one of his wittiest letters, of which I will now only quote the opening, as it has been published in his works: "On reading, gentlemen, the obliging letter with which you have just honoured me, signed by a great many of you, I have become confirmed in the notion that you are all very honest persons, quite disposed to do justice to authors, but that it is the same with you as with all men who are more versed in the agreeable arts than practised in the exact sciences, and who make phantoms and perplexities out of matters of calculation, which any man of method would resolve without difficulty." And the author of "The Barber" thereupon gives the actors, very complacently, a lecture on book-keeping. Then, after teaching them how they ought to proceed, in order to supply correct accounts, he concludes in these words: "Believe me, gentlemen, no badly made out accounts with men of letters; too proud to accept favours, they are too badly off to undergo losses. As long as you do not adopt the system of exact accounts, of which you alone are ignorant, you will always have the annoyance of having yourselves reproached with a systematic habit of depriving men of letters of their rights, which assuredly never entered either into the heart or mind of any of you."

As the actors did not appreciate this lesson in book-keeping, which Beaumarchais gave them with so much complaisance and politeness, they replied that they were about to assemble the advocates who formed the council of the Theatre, and to name four actors as commissioners to examine the affair. "To assemble," said Beaumarchais, "an entire council of advocates and commissioners, to consult whether I am, or am not to be sent, an exact and signed account of what I am entitled to as author, on the profits of my piece, appeared to me rather a strange preliminary." However, the council in question did not assemble, months passed, and "The Barber of Seville" was no longer played. Beaumarchais hearing nothing further, either about his account or his piece, persisted with still more energy. The actors finding themselves in a corner, begged the support of the Duke de Duras, who came forward and begged the applicant to discuss the matter with him. Beaumarchais wished for nothing better; he hastened to the Duke de Duras, in order to offer him the same instruction in book-keeping, which he had vainly proffered to the actors. The Duke, who was a member of the French Academy, prided himself on being almost as fond of dramatic literature as of the fair persons intrusted with its interpretation. Beaumarchais wrote to him these lines:—

"You take too much interest, M. le Maréchal, in the pro-

gress of the finest of all arts, not to be of opinion that if those who play the author's pieces gain incomes of 20,000 livres by doing so, those who make the fortune of the actors should be able to derive from them the mere means of existence. I connect, M. le Maréchal, no personal motive with my request; the mere love of justice and literature determines me to make it. A man who might have been impelled by his dramatic genius to renew the masterpieces of our great authors, convinced that he cannot live three months with the fruit of his three years' study, after losing five in waiting for it, becomes a writer of paragraphs, of libels, or lowers himself by some other trade equally lucrative and degrading."

After conversing with Beaumarchais, the Duke de Duras appeared to become inflamed with a noble ardour for the cause of justice. He declared that it was time to terminate these disputes, which showed the authors to be at the mercy of the actors. He proposed to substitute for these arbitrary reckonings, a new system, in which the rights of the two parties were provided for in the most clear, the most precise, and the most equitable manner. He asked Beaumarchais to consult some of the dramatic authors, and to submit a plan to him. The latter replied, that in a question which interested them all equally, all the dramatic authors who had written for the Théâtre-Français, were on an equality, and that they ought all to be assembled. The Duke de Duras consented, and the first Society of Dramatic Authors was founded by means of this circular, in which

Beaumarchais invited them all to dine at his house :—

"Paris, June 27, 1777.

"One of the things, Sir, which appears to me to be the most opposed to the progress of letters is the multitude of mortifications to which dramatic authors are subjected at the Théâtre-Français ; amongst the number, that of seeing their interests constantly compromised in the statement of accounts, is in my eyes not the least weighty.

"Long struck with this idea, the love of justice and of letters, has at last determined me to require personally from the actors an exact and rigid account of what is due to me for 'The Barber of Seville,' the least important of dramatic productions, it is true; but the slightest title is good when nothing but justice is asked for.

"Marshal de Duras, who also desires sincerely that this justice may be done to literary men, has had the kindness to communicate to me a new plan, and to enter with me into very interesting details in reference to the stage, which he has begged me to communicate to the literary men who devote their attention to it, while I endeavour to collect their opinions on the subject.

"I have undertaken this the more willingly from the fact that at the head of my most gratifying successes, I should place that of having been able to contribute to the liberation of genius from even one of its fetters.

"Consequently, gentlemen, if you will do me the honour to accept my fare, next Thursday, I hope to convince you, as well as the dramatic authors, whom I consider it an honour to follow, that the least important of men of letters will, nevertheless, on all occasions be the most zealous defender of those who cultivate them.

"I have the honour to be,

"With the greatest consideration, Sir, &c.,

"Caron de Beaumarchais."

To collect men who had hitherto been accustomed to live apart and frequently in mutual jealousy, was not an easy matter, even when their common interests were appealed to. The reader will judge by various unpublished letters, of the obstacles which Beaumarchais had to overcome. To give more weight to his enterprise, he wished first of all to associate in it those dramatic authors who formed part of the French Academy. There were three of them: old Saurin, the author of "Spartacus," who accepted without too many invitations; Marmontel, who consented with eagerness to take his place beneath the banner hoisted by Beaumarchais; and finally La Harpe, who was still young, who had been newly elected, who was rather difficult to manage, who had numerous quarrels (his enemies called him *la Harpie*), and who had not yet learned to forgive injuries, which, to speak the truth, he was never able to do completely, even after his conversion. We subjoin his answer to Beaumarchais' invitation. If the end appears to proceed from a man who is somewhat intractable, the opening seems also to show some annoyance at seeing another person than himself come forward with the approbation of the Duke de Duras.

"June 29.

"Marshal de Duras," writes La Harpe, "has already done me the honour to communicate to me, and even in much detail, the new arrangements which he proposes, and which all tend to the improvement of the stage, and the satisfaction of

the authors. I am none the less disposed to confer with you, and with those who, like you, Sir, have aided in enriching our stage, on our common interests, and on the means of ameliorating and insuring the position of dramatic writers.

"It forms part of my plan of life, necessitated by pressing occupations, never to dine away from home;* but I shall have the honour of calling upon you in the afternoon. I must inform you beforehand, that if by chance M. de Sauvigny † is to be present, or M. Dorat, I shall not come. You know too much of the world to make me meet my avowed enemies. I have the honour to be, with the most distinguished consideration, Sir, &c.

"DELAHARPE."

Beaumarchais, somewhat embarrassed—for he had invited both Sauvigny and Dorat—replied to La Harpe by the following letter:—

"You have imposed upon me, Sir, the severe obligation of informing you whether MM. Dorat and de Sauvigny are to do me the honour of dining with me to-day. One has promised to come to dinner, the other in the afternoon; but in a common cause, allow me to observe to you, that the custom, in every country, is to have a truce for private quarrels; and are the present ones sufficiently grave to produce personal antipathies to such an extent between the most respectable literary men of their class?

"I should be too happy if, seconding my pacific views, you did me the honour to come, and forget, in the charm of an assembly of persons who all honour you, trifling resentments, which perhaps have only arisen from want of a thorough understanding.

* The dinner was a meal which was taken in the afternoon, between two and three o'clock.

† The Chevalier de Sauvigny, author of "Les Illinois," and "Gabrielle d'Estrées."

"Let us not divide the faggot, Sir. With all our forces assembled, we are not too strong for so great a machine as the Comédie-Française. We do not dine until three, and I shall hope to have you as my guest until a quarter past three, so much do I desire it.

"I have the honour to be, &c.,

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

La Harpe sent another reply, in which the celebrated aristarch shows us that forbearance was never his distinctive characteristic.

"It is absolutely impossible for me, Sir, ever to meet, voluntarily, two men whose persons and works I equally despise; one of them (Dorat) has insulted me personally in a calumnious letter, worthy of Fréron's sheets, in which it was inserted; the other one (Sauvigny) is an unsociable and ferocious madman, whom no one sees, and who is always ready to fight for his verses. You understand, Sir, that that would be fighting for nothing! I cannot conceive how you can rank such men among *the most respectable men of literature*. There is, as you see, *nothing literary* in what I reproach them with; you have only to read what I wrote when I defended myself; you will find nothing similar with me, nor with the respectable men of literature, or of any other class with which I associate.

"I beg you will accept my excuses and my very sincere regrets. I attach but little importance to the disputes of self-love; but I never forget real offences.

I have the honour to be,

"With the most distinguished consideration, Sir,

"DELAHARPE."

It was necessary to do without La Harpe, at least on this first occasion; for I see, from another note of

his, that at the following sitting, when Beaumarchais doubtless sacrificed Dorat and Sauvigny to him for that day, the irascible academician accepted the invitation for the afternoon, and wrote in the most joyous tone as follows:—

"As your fresh invitation makes me presume that the obstacles which kept me away no longer exist, I will go to your house very willingly about five o'clock. Not that I renounce the pleasure of finding myself glass in hand * with so agreeable a man as yourself, Sir; but you move in too good society not to sup, and I confess to you that supper is my favourite meal. Accordingly, I must say to you, like Horace:

"'Arcesse vel imperium fer.'

"I have the honour to be, with equal esteem and consideration, Sir, &c.,

"DELAHARPE."

If Beaumarchais had a great deal of trouble in arranging the quarrels of some authors, he was not less perplexed in overcoming the carelessness of several others. Thus he was very anxious for the co-operation of Collé. The witty author of "Dupuis and Desronais," and of "La Partie de Chasse de Henri IV.," had had some rather sharp disputes with the actors, and was in a position to do much service to the common cause. Unfortunately Collé had grown old; he wished only to enjoy his repose,

* In his "Cours de Littérature," La Harpe exhibits a certain magisterial air, which gives value to this somewhat bacchic passage, representing La Harpe and Beaumarchais "glass in hand."

and would not interfere with anything. The following is his answer to Beaumarchais :—

"I did not receive, Sir, the letter you did me the honour to write to me on the 27th of June, until the evening of the 9th of July, at my country house, where I shall be immovable until the end of October. The address of the Palais-Royal, where I do not live, and the want of address on the part of the Duke of Orleans' *suisses*,* doubtless prevented it reaching me sooner, although I ought to have had it the next day. I only lay stress upon these details, in order to avoid being thought guilty of impertinence by the author of the charming 'Barber,' of which I have declared myself the most zealous partisan. I do not miss a single representation.

"As for the object of your letter, Sir, I will confess to you, with my customary freedom, that if I had been at Paris, I should not any the more have had the honour of making my appearance at your assembly of dramatic authors. I am old, and disgusted even to sickness with this dear royal company. May God send us another. For the last three years I have seen neither actors nor actresses.

De tous ces gens-là
J'en ai jusque-là.

"I wish you none the less success, Sir, in your scheme; but permit me to confine myself to expressing my wishes for its prosperity, of which I should doubt if you were not at the head of the enterprise, which possesses all the difficulties you can desire. You have proved to the public, Sir, that nothing is impossible to you. I always thought that you did not like what was easy; I could form my opinion from the boldness you have shown in making our sentimental nation

* Collé was the Duke of Orleans' secretary and reader.

laugh at the theatre, in spite of itself, when it is only desirous of weeping, or of being interested in a virtuous manner, because it has no longer any virtue.

"I have the honour to be very sincerely, Sir, &c.

"COLLE.

"At Grignon, near Choisy-le-Roi, July 10, 1777."

It was in vain that Beaumarchais, after Collé's return to Paris, insisted on enrolling this old satirist in the crusade against the actors; he could only obtain from him the following note, which is sufficiently amusing:—

"Monsieur Collé thanks M. de Beaumarchais for remembering him. He begs him again to be kind enough to accept his excuses in the affair of the actors. He is too old to trouble himself about it. Like the rat in the fable, he has retired within his Dutch cheese; it appears probable that he will not come out of it, with the intention of making the world go on better than it does now. For the last fifteen years he has uttered, with regard to the interested plans of the actors, the following verse of Corneille's:—

'Le héros voit la fourbe et s'en moque dans l'âme,'

And with regard to their impolite and disobliging conduct, this verse of Piron's in 'Callisthène:'

'A force de mépris je me trouve paisible.'

"M. Collé presents thousands and thousands of compliments to M. de Beaumarchais."

The founder of the *drame bourgeois*, author of the "Père de Famille," Diderot, would also have been a valuable recruit for this battle. Beaumarchais invoked

his aid; but like Collé, Diderot was old, and only asked to be allowed to live in peace.

"There you are then, Sir," writes Diderot, "at the head of an insurrection* of the dramatic authors against the actors. You know what your object is, and what steps to take; you have a committee, syndics, assemblies, and deliberations. I have taken part in none of these things, and it will be impossible for me to take part in those to come. I pass my life in the country, almost as much a stranger to the affairs of the town, as I am forgotten by the inhabitants. Allow me to confine myself to offering up prayers for your success. While you are fighting, I will keep my arms raised towards heaven on the mountain of Meudon. May the writers who devote themselves to the stage, owe their independence to you! But to speak the truth to you, I much fear that it will be more difficult to deal with the company of actors than with the Parliament. Here ridicule will not have the same force. Never mind, your attempt will not be the less just nor the less honourable. I salute and embrace you. You have long been acquainted with the feelings of esteem with which I am, Sir,

"Your very humble and obedient servant,

"DIDEROT.

"At Sèves (Sèvres), Aug. 5, 1777."

By the side of the dramatic authors who are careless and satisfied with offering up prayers for the success of the enterprise, are found the dramatic authors with lofty sentiments, those whose pieces have never produced more than very small receipts,

* An allusion to what was then called the insurrection of the Americans, in which Beaumarchais mixed himself up with the same vivacity, and at the same time, as the insurrection of the authors.

who are otherwise well provided for, and who fear to compromise the honour of letters, by appearing to quarrel about a question of money. At the head of this class comes Bret, an estimable writer, but whose pieces had but little success, who was censor, editor of the "Gazette de France," and who nevertheless consented to form part of the society, but with certain reservations. Other authors are impeded in their good wishes for the new association, by very different causes, and which seem to announce a sufficiently great want of that "vile metal," to which Bret desires too much attention should not be paid; for example, Poinsinet de Sivry, the cousin of little Poinsinet, the author of "Briséis," and some other failures, wished for nothing better than to be present at the first meeting of the dramatic authors; but he was prevented by an obstacle of which he will inform us himself in a sufficiently lively manner.

"An invincible obstacle prevents me, Sir, from accepting your invitation. Remember, I beg, that you had to deal with a corrupt judge. Well, Sir, I had to deal with a rogue of a *huissier*, who kept from me all summonses and notices of action, by means of which I find myself, contrary to every kind of justice, detained a prisoner at For-l'Evêque, for a judgment debt of which I can prove the payment, and I have resolved to remain there, until I can succeed in getting this *huissier* hanged. Receiving your letter this morning at ten o'clock, I have not sufficient time between now and the dinner hour to get the good man proceeded against and disposed of. These *huissiers* die hard, and it is said take a long

time to hang; accordingly, Sir, allow me to defer the pleasure of dining with you until another time.

"What, Sir! have you then determined to be all your life at law with pretty women; and do you think to dispose as easily of a company of actresses, as of a mere councillor's wife? I found myself, once in my life, in such a squabble, and if I am still in existence, it is because there is a god for poor dramatic authors, as for hackney coaches and drunkards. But, let us speak seriously, since the interests of our fellow literary men are at stake. Nothing can be more legitimate, Sir, than the cause you undertake to defend; and, although you may have to meet powerful opposition, I augur for it a happy and prompt issue, since it has you for its advocate, and for arbitrator, a nobleman who is so much inclined towards the interests of literature, and otherwise so irreproachable a judge, as Marshal de Duras; thus, our common interests could not be in better hands. I regret sincerely not to be able to co-operate personally, by being actually present, in what you desire. All I can do, Sir, is to give you my voice and full powers, so that throughout the course of this affair you will always have two votes to make use of, your own and mine, without reference to the others. I am extremely gratified, Sir, by the opportunity which you give me of testifying to you all the esteem and high consideration

With which I am, Sir, &c.,

"POINSINET DE SIVRY.

"July 1, 1777."

In spite of the sufficiently varied hindrances, which, as is seen, interfered somewhat with the success of Beaumarchais' plans for liberating dramatic authors, he still persists in them; his scheme was, besides, received by the large majority of authors with an enthusiasm of which the following letter

from Chamfort (hitherto unpublished, like all the preceding letters), will suffice to give an idea.

"I beg of you, Sir," writes Chamfort to him, "not to impute to me the delay of the answer which I owe you for the letter you did me the honour to write to me. I have only just received it at Chantilli, whence I start to-morrow to attend to your obliging invitation. Whatever your modesty may say of it, Sir, one of your most incontestable rights is that of taking a lively interest in the fate of dramatic authors, as it is that of the author of the Memorials to interest himself in the fate of men of letters in general. It may be reasonably hoped that your wit, your intelligence, and your activity, will find the means of remedying the principal abuses, the combination of which would necessarily annihilate the dramatic art in France. You will thus be rendering a true service to the nation, and connecting your name once more with your epoch, a kind of glory for which you have doubtless acquired a taste. Such a piece, as may owe its birth to the reform you are about to produce, will, perhaps, last longer than such and such a court of justice—and the 'Philoctetes' of Sophocles has survived the 'Parliament' of the Areopagus and the Amphyctions.

"I hope, Sir, that the *states-general of the dramatic art*, who are to meet to-morrow at your house, will not experience the fate of the other States-general, that of *perceiving all our evils without solacing one.* * However this may be, I believe firmly that if you do not succeed, we may as well renounce all hope of reform. As for myself, personally, I shall at least have gained the advantage of forming a closer acquaintance with a man of such acknowledged merit, and whom the chances of society have not made me meet as often as I should have desired.

* An allusion to a verse of Voltaire's on the old Sta General.

"I have the honour to be, with the highest consideration, Sir,

"CHAMFORT,

"Secretary of the Commands of his most Serene Highness, Monseigneur, the Prince of Condé.

"Chantilli, Wednesday, July 2."

The *states-general of the dramatic art,* as Chamfort calls them, met, then, for the first time at Beaumarchais' *inter pocula.* He had succeeded in collecting and causing to fraternise together twenty-three dramatic authors, all writing for the same theatre. This was no slight matter. After dinner, they proceeded to the election of four commissioners, who were deputed to defend the interests of the society, and to work in its name at the new regulations asked for by the Duke de Duras. Beaumarchais, the promoter of the entire enterprise, was naturally chosen the first. The names of two academicians, Saurin and Marmontel, were added to his, and afterwards that of Sedaine, who, although he did not yet belong to the Academy, enjoyed a high reputation, which he had very justly acquired. They next prepared their declaration of independence against the actors.

"This assembly of insurgents," to employ Diderot's expression, recals to some extent, if the comparison may be admitted, the group of colonial representatives, who just a year previously had proclaimed American independence. But it was easier to throw

off the yoke of the English, than that of the actors. The latter, on hearing of the authors' rising, assembled on their side, called to their assistance four or five barristers, with the famous Gerbier at their head, and prepared to make a vigorous resistance. We shall not enter into the particulars of this struggle, because the greater part of them are mentioned in a Memorial published by Beaumarchais, and which, although less read than the Memorials against Goëzman, is not perhaps less interesting. Therein we see the actors, cleverly directed by Gerbier, prolonging the affair for three years, disconcerting and paralysing Beaumarchais' manœuvres, sowing discord in the enemy's camp, circumventing the Duke de Duras, who, after declaring that he would break up the Comédie-Française if it resisted, no longer knowing which way to turn, referred the authors to his associate the Duke de Richelieu, who, equally at a loss, sent them back to the Duke de Duras. The actors afterwards made a pretence of accepting an arrangement proposed by the authors, with the exception of a few modifications; then their advocate, Gerbier, through an alteration in the minute of this arrangement, obtained by surprise a decree of the council, which sanctioned the claims of the actors. This decree of the council was revoked on the representation of Beaumarchais. A second decree, ob-

tained by him, was in turn revoked under the influence of Gerbier, until at last the king, fatigued by this eternal contest, caused *proprio motu*, a third decree, to be issued by the council, which for a time terminated the quarrel, a decree of which Beaumarchais does not speak in his Memorial, and of which we shall have a word to say. The points which interest us above all in this debate, are those which remained naturally in the shade during the epoch in which the question was agitated—the secret incidents which characterise the men and the situations.

For example, the weak side of this first association of dramatic authors, was its spirit of jealousy. From the very first meetings the twenty-three dramatic authors could not agree. The majority were in favour of commissioners appointed permanently; the minority, as represented by Lemierre, Rochon de Chabannes, and two or three others, were ardently opposed to the permanency of the offices, attributing rather unworthy motives to the commissioners, who, they said, "would not fail to turn to their own advantage the influence their position would give them." Instead of yielding to the wishes of the majority, they declared they would rather withdraw. Thereupon appeared a somewhat plain letter, hitherto unpublished, from Beaumarchais to Rochon de Cha-

bannes, which we here reproduce with the postscripts of Marmontel and Saurin.

"Paris, January 8, 1778.

"I should be very glad, Sir, if our assembled friends thought they owed as much attention to your observations on the commissionership, as they will certainly be afflicted by your retirement; but independently of a double decision, which has been given on this point, and of the respect which every one owes to his engagements, I think your wish for the mutability of the office founded on such strange reasons, that if I were in need of arguments in support of the received plan, I should choose precisely those which you employ for attacking it.

"Indeed, Sir, I doubt whether the entire body of men of letters be of your opinion that it ought to change its commissioners, so that, enjoying in succession the pretended influence given by the appointment, each author, by approaching the persons in office, may in his turn have an opportunity of obtaining favours, and the means of advancing himself personally; which, properly understood, supposes that in case of debate these commissioners, more occupied with their own fate than with ours, would not fail to neglect for their own advantage the sacred interests intrusted to them.

"As for myself, Sir, who cannot reflect without blushing, that, independently of the honour of defending and representing the literary body, some advantage of another kind is seen, I declare, most positively, that as soon as our present work is once finished, I shall immediately tender my resignation. I also declare that I shall recommend in a not less decided manner the nomination to my place of perpetual commissioner, a man whom the acknowledged loftiness of his principles renders superior to that vague hope of fortune and elevation, which appears to me to inflame too many minds.

"You see, Sir, that there is a considerable distance between us. You look for advantages, where I see nothing but abnegation and sacrifice. You would make every one willing to submit, while we ask for men sufficiently firm to support with constancy the weight of contradiction; for such will be the duties of the commissionership; and the task of our commissioners being to maintain with firmness the authors' rights, which are incessantly invaded by the actors, my opinion is, that those who fulfil this painful office satisfactorily, far from aspiring to advantages for themselves, will, perhaps, only too often have the mortification of making fruitless efforts on our behalf against those of the actors.

"I should not even be disinclined to advise the literary body to look upon the degrees of personal advantage obtained by its commissioners, as a pretty certain thermometer of the coldness or warmth of their zeal for its interests, and then, perhaps, it might be necessary to speak of changing.

"I hope, Sir, you will not be offended if I make a free use of the naïveté of your opinion, to expose to you frankly my own. Animated with the same desire of arriving at the best result, one of us two is deceived, and that is all; the Society will decide.

"My own opinion, Sir, is, that a plan undertaken for the general good of the body ought not to suffer by the absence or momentary ill-humour of some of its members, when all have been duly invited, and that we ought to continue our labours even with less assistance, and as if all those who are to reap their fruits, still exhibited the same desire to take part in them; but, as this is not said for you, I flatter myself, in the name of the Society, that you will renounce your painful intention of withdrawing, and that, leaving idle or premature questions on one side, a moment of healthy reflection will soon bring back to us a fellow-writer whom we all love, and on whose intelligence we have placed infinite reliance, in order to insure our success.

"I have the honour to be, with the highest consideration, Sir, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS,
"J. SEDAINE, in support."

"From the present day, I propose resigning, and I shall always be of opinion that the commissioners ought to be appointed permanently. As for the rest, I do not think that one or two contrary votes ought to invalidate the deliberations of an entire body.

"MARMONTEL."

"I think like M. de Beaumarchais; I am far from caring about my place of commissioner, having begged the assembly to receive my resignation; and begging it to do so still, in consideration of my age and deficient health; I do not otherwise think that M. Rochon's opinion ought to be placed above the general decision.

"SAURIN."

In another letter to the same Rochon de Chabannes, Beaumarchais complains strongly of the different influences which are tending to disorganise the growing Society of Dramatic Authors. "The intrigues of the actresses, on one side," he writes, "the division of principles on the other, and certain claims, certain discontent, and certain secret interests, turn a company of sensible persons into a disunited body, full of animosities, reproaches, and harshness; it is time this were over."

The actors, on the contrary, advanced to the combat with one accord. Not content with paying skilful and eloquent advocates, and of taking advan-

tage of the still more powerful influence of the female portion of the corporation, which Gudin compares to the battalion of Catherine de Médicis dispersing the army of Henry IV. with caresses, the actors procured defenders even in the ranks of the dramatic authors themselves. Thus they received and played a very bad tragedy, "Nadir," by Dubuisson, on condition that this author would declare against his associates. This Dubuisson had published his piece with a very insulting preface against the Society of Authors, and what was graver still, a man of taste, but who scarcely had anything else besides taste, which rendered him naturally rather jealous of those who had something more, Suard, at that time censor, had in a certain way associated himself with Dubuisson in this attack, by approving of his preface and piece. Thereupon arose a great clamour among the dramatic authors. A storm of letters reached Beaumarchais. La Harpe demanded that means should be decided upon for obtaining satisfaction for the *incredible preface* of the *incredible tragedy of "Nadir,"* and for the unfairness of the censor; Sedaine and Marmontel were not less enraged. Gudin, in his anger, called Dubuisson, who was a Creole, a "Carribee," and Suard, an enemy of letters. Beaumarchais drew up, in the name of the assembly, an address to the minister Amelot, demanding either that the publication of Dubuisson's work should be stopped, and the conduct

of Suard disavowed, or that the Society should be permitted to reply in a public statement. The minister Amelot imposed silence, and promised to connect the incident with the ground of the action. Marmontel became indignant.

"I learn, my dear colleague," he writes to Beaumarchais, "that the question of our complaint is evaded, and that we are told the incident will be decided with the rest of the suit, which means to say, in good French, that we are being laughed at. This is the time for producing a Memorial, putting in the clearest light the insolence of the author of the preface, and the unworthiness of the approver; this is the time for a demonstration of vigour. Produce a good Memorial; your courage is known to me, as well as your eloquence. I recommend our honour to your energy and activity; see the ministers, and tell them that an assembly of seventeen persons, who are men of heart, do not allow themselves to be treated with contempt, and insulted with impunity. I embrace you with all my heart.

"MARMONTEL."

When Beaumarchais has to be urged to write, to speak, and to dispute, Marmontel is always full of ardour, but when his active colleague has need of him, he is always in the country or kept back by some business; and if Beaumarchais complains of his inactivity, he gets out of the affair wittily enough, to judge by a letter of which we only quote this fragment:—

"Reason and strict justice, supported by your eloquence and excellent argument, have no need of my assistance; and

I recollect, *à-propos* of this, a tale of my native Limosin. A curé who was a great sportsman was saying mass, and when he reached the *Lavabo* he heard the barking of the dogs, who had started the hare; 'Is Briffaut there?' he said to the clerk—'Yes, M. le Curé.' 'In that case the hare is done for—*Lavabo inter innocentes manus meas, &c.*'"

Beaumarchais represents Briffaut, the Comédie Française is the hare; but this hare is not easy to take, and while Marmontel is washing his hands of the matter, Beaumarchais, who is a hundred times more busy, and who is hurrying incessantly from one end of France to the other, is obliged to bear all the weight of the combat alone. If he asks Saurin to assist him, the good man pleads his infirmities, he cannot go out, he is taking medicine. As for Sedaine, he is more active, but he is something like the fly of the coach. He always considers that things are not going on quickly enough, while his share in the contest consists in collecting all the rumours, all the gossip, even of the most disagreeable kind, for Beaumarchais, and to offer them to him with the most amusing good nature. I will only quote one example of it, from the fact of its having produced a burst of passion, which was rather rare with the author of "The Barber of Seville," who did not easily lose his temper. Here his patience altogether failed him, and the fact can be easily understood. After three years of fatiguing and barren struggles, there had

been an appearance of reconciliation between the authors and the actors in April, 1780. They seemed at last to have come to an understanding. Authors, actors, and actresses had all dined together at Beaumarchais' house, and the next day Gerbier, with the consent of the Duke de Duras, had transformed the agreement arrived at into a decree of the council, but not until he had made some important alterations in it to the detriment of the authors; and while Beaumarchais was occupying himself with warding off this treacherous blow, it had been said that he was plotting with Gerbier and the actors to take in the authors. Sedaine did not fail, according to his custom, to be charitable enough to transmit this agreeable rumour to his friend:—

"I write to you, my dear colleague," says Sedaine, "while reflecting that what I write to you is useless, and that you certainly feel as much as myself the conduct of the *homme aux cordons* (the Duke de Duras). We must sound and explain this affair as soon as possible, for the sake of our tranquillity and the honour of literature. This man must have a great contempt for us, or must think he can deceive us with entire impunity. If I had known of the decree of the council, and what it contained, my advice would not have been to go to his house, but to assemble the authors and take their resolution with regard to this grave matter, which completes what the actors have been doing for the last three years. If we do not have satisfaction, we, the literary commissioners, appear to have cooperated in this infamy, and the dinner with the actors, which followed, is not calculated to destroy such an idea. There

are few assemblies at which literary men have been present without some one saying to them: 'Take care, M. de Beaumarchais is too cunning for you all; he will betray you while appearing to defend you.' I who think you a very honest man; I who know that a man of great wit, and intrusted with important interests, would behave with much rectitude from policy, if not from inclination or principle, have laughed in the face of those who have made these remarks to me; but at present these remarks are made by some of our dramatic authors, and you see we are compromised by them. It is true that you play the best part in the matter; you are the man of wit and we the fools.

"Accordingly I beg, my dear colleague, in the name of all of us, that you will hurry matters on. If justice be not done us, I give up all engagements with the dramatic authors; I do not wish to belong to a body which is despised, although it is a long way from being despicable.

"May 2."

To be annoyed with such a letter, it was not necessary to be very susceptible. Beaumarchais' patience could not stand it. The following was his answer to Sedaine:—

"Paris, May 3, 1780.

"I did not reply, my dear colleague, to your letter when I received it, because it heated my brain too much to allow me to do so with becoming calmness. I have passed my entire life in doing my best, while listening to the subdued murmurs and outrages of those whom I was serving; but nothing, perhaps, has shocked me so much as what now arrives. In truth, it is impossible to say which gets the best of it here, stupidity or injustice. I have had enough of it; let another person do better and I will applaud him. I

have written some long and severe observations on each clause of this ridiculous decree. I afterwards re-wrote the clauses of the decree, and I showed my Monday's work yesterday at one o'clock to the Duke de Duras. This morning I take it to M. Amelot to obtain, with the marshal's consent, the remodelling of the decree.

"But whether it be remodelled or not, the remainder of this week will witness the continuation of my labours as commissioner, and not another one in my life will be devoted to the matter. A meeting will be appointed for Sunday morning, at which I shall render an account of everything, and no human consideration will keep me for a longer period in the wake of this very grateful dramatic literature.

"As for the rest, whatever the wisdom of my fellow writers might have done without the dinner of Friday, it can do just the same after; and in spite of this dinner, which has produced no change in their affairs, beyond the death of a few bottles of wine spilt in honour of the reconciliation, a reward of twenty-five louis is offered to the ingenious man who can explain to the meeting of Sunday what interest the very stupidly accused Beaumarchais can have in favouring the actors to the prejudice of the literary men.

"You have my best wishes, my honour, and my love.

"I feel, on reading my scrawl, that my head is still excited; but it would be in vain to re-commence. I find myself rather less my own master than I could desire."

To this epistle *ab irato,* Sedaine, acknowledging that he has been wrong, replied by an affectionate letter, which proves that if the author of "Le Philosophe sans le savoir" was fond of scandal, he was at bottom an excellent man.

"Yes, my dear colleague," wrote Sedaine, "your head was heated when you replied to me. Perhaps, however, something

in my letter has escaped me which offended you, for I had just left the Italian theatre, where I had heard things which put me in a passion. I cannot, however, think that you took for my own sentiments what I said to you about our ungrateful and unreasonable associates. However, with the exception of three or four, they do us justice, and it is to you that we must refer it all. If I have said anything which has distressed you, I ask you very sincerely to forgive me. It is for you to show wisdom; it will do you more honour than me, who am much older than you.

"Continue your noble and excellent task, finish your work, and let us serve them in spite of their ingratitude. When you have terminated the affair to our honour, I will beg them to assemble at my house, and to order me to form part of a deputation to go and thank you for all your solicitude. That is all we can offer you. They will do it, or I separate myself from them for the rest of my life, having no further need of anything but tranquillity and your friendship.

"I embrace you with all my heart, and let us leave bad dispositions to themselves.

"May 3, 1780."

After two more or less contradictory decrees from the council of state, which were obtained successively March 17 and May 12, 1780, from the rival influence of Gerbier and Beaumarchais, a third decree of December 9, 1780, put a temporary stop to the quarrel between the authors and comedians, and the favourite course of the latter was adopted, a "badly made out account." This decree enacted for the benefit of the authors, first, that the actors should be obliged to reckon in their account of the receipts, not

only the money taken at the door, but all that really went towards the composition of the receipts, such as boxes let for the night's performance, boxes let by the year, subscriptions for life, &c. Secondly, the king granted the authors even more than they had asked; he gave them no longer the ninth, but the seventh part of the receipts. This favour, however, was done away with by the eleventh article of this same edict, which enacted for the benefit of the actors, that the amount of receipts, below which a piece fell "within the rules" and became their property, should be raised from 1200 livres in winter and 800 livres in summer, to that of 2300 livres in winter and 1800 livres in summer; that is to say, that the actors, sacrificed on the one side, received on the other an exorbitant advantage. They were enabled to escape paying the seventh, by bringing the receipts down to 2300 livres, which was not difficult, and which made the piece their entire property. In our opinion, nothing less judicious than this decree could have been imagined: to the actors it was a permanent temptation to get rid of a rigorous condition, by making the piece fall "within the rules," in order to revive it afterwards, and enjoy its proceeds without having any one else to share in them. This mode of compensation was in itself so absurd, that it was abandoned by both sides, and the interests of actors and authors continued to be regulated on the old footing, in the midst of

mutual recriminations and arbitrary reckonings on the part of the players, until the Revolution. But still the association of dramatic authors, founded with so much trouble by Beaumarchais, contrived one way or the other to exist. Each year we find it at work from time to time, either regulating disputes between authors in a friendly way, or vainly soliciting the establishment of a second Théâtre-Français, or petitioning, not less vainly, that provincial managers may be forced to pay so much per night to the authors whose works they profit by.

At last the Revolution came, and put an end to the undue privileges of the actors of the Théâtre-Français, and the frauds of the provincial managers. After the presentation of a petition, drawn up by La Harpe, Beaumarchais, and Sedaine, as representatives of the Society of Dramatic Authors, and under the influence of divers Memorials published by Beaumarchais, the National Assembly recognised the authors' right of property, suppressed all the privileges of the Comédie-Française, and decreed, January 13th, 1791, that the works of living writers should not be represented in any public theatre throughout France without the formal consent of the authors. From that time, the authors found themselves, as regarded the Théâtre-Français, and all the other theatres, on a footing of complete independence, and in a position to defend their interests and their rights. To protect

these interests was one of the principal cares of Beaumarchais' old age; we find him labouring incessantly to regulate the relations of authors with the different theatres of Paris, and exhausting himself in endeavouring to make the directors of provincial theatres understand that they have no right to profit by the works of living authors without payment.

No notion can be formed of the difficulty with which this idea, so simple as it appears in the present day, was instilled into the minds of provincial managers, who had been accustomed, from all eternity, to make no allowance to the authors. It was a frightful tyranny, against which not only the managers, but the municipalities themselves protested! In a petition to the National Assembly, Beaumarchais inserted a letter from the director of a provincial theatre, who had written to him in the plainest terms: "We play your pieces because they bring us good receipts, and we shall play them in spite of you, in spite of all the decrees in the world, and I advise no one to come and prevent us: he would have a bad time of it." But Beaumarchais was not a man to be discouraged in the defence of a just cause. To the end of his life he constituted himself the advocate of the dramatic authors, both with the ministers of the Monarchy, and those of the Republic; and one of his last letters was the following, addressed to the Minis-

ter of the Interior under the Directory, in support of a petition from the Society :—

"Citizen Minister,—You know that Voltaire often said, 'Literature is the highest of the fine arts, but it is the lowest trade.' He did not mean to say that it was the meanest, but the poorest; above all, in the case of dramatic literature, in so far as it is the only calling which cannot support the person who exercises it, owing to the insufficiency of the laws or the disdain of the magistrates to protect this noble property, although they must be well aware that no other is so much entitled to that fine appellation, since it is neither the fruit of a disgraceful traffic, nor of hereditary laziness, since it comes out of the brain of the author perfectly formed, as in ancient time Minerva came out of that of the master of the gods; a sublime emblem, by which the ancients wished to show how a happy conception is the sacred property of the man who brings it forth.

"Obliged to make over their dramatic compositions to others, for these others to bring them out, and thus dependent on theatrical speculators and managers, authors for the last hundred years have in vain claimed the justice of the law courts, in order to obtain the most paltry share of the profits of their long labours, which furnish the means of living in abundance to so many secondary beings who derive it from them alone.

"The abuse has now reached such a point, that a manager of a theatre, at Lille, has had the shamelessness to write to the literary men empowered by the authors, the council being composed of several, that he will only give a certain price in return for the works he appropriates, and that if we wish to prevent him from representing our works, he will have all the town on his side. And yet we are living under a system of laws formed solely for the protection of property.

"More astonishing still, another theatrical manager at Tou-

louse, abusing the municipal scarf with which a misfortune has decorated him, has the audacity to suspend the course of justice, and imposes on the assembled authors the necessity of having recourse to you, as minister, and exercising a superior authority. We must no longer hope for any but mediocre works, unless provision be made that a masterpiece, accepted by the public, shall suffice to enable the unpretending man who has produced it to live for a time. A thorough conviction of the impossibility of finding the means of subsistence in a kind of work which has so many attractions for me, has obliged me throughout to class among my amusements an occupation which requires the exercise of every faculty on the part of the man who wishes to exercise it worthily. Hence it has resulted, that, with a lively perception of the object, I have been less able to reach it than others who have given themselves up to it altogether, and have thus remained much behind.*

"It is less, then, in the character of a dramatic author than as the author's friend, and as the lover of so fine an art, that I venture to add, Citizen Minister, this letter to the very pressing petition of the literary men who address you, with so much right, to obtain the enforcement of the laws which concern them; we all hope you will remind the *gens de gout* in your offices to place before you the documents transmitted to you by the Citizen Framery.†

"I join, Citizen Minister, the signers of the petition, in expressing my respectful gratitude.

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

* This tone of sincere modesty is sufficiently rare with Beaumarchais to be worth the trouble of mentioning. He was in his old age when he spoke of himself thus, admitting, with justice, the weak side of his talent, and even exaggerating it a little.

† He was the first agent of the Society of Dramatic Authors.

Since the date of this letter, Messidor, in the year five of the Republic, matters have much changed; the rights of dramatic authors are no longer contested; just regulations insure their participation in the profits of their works. At the Théâtre-Français, in particular, there are no longer either accounts "badly made out," or "pieces falling within the rules," and confiscated by the actors; nor are the subscriptions deducted, nor the amount of the receipts concealed; nor is a sum levied beforehand for expenses which are variable and arbitrarily fixed; and although the tariff of the author's remuneration may at first sight appear lower than that of the old *régime*, it is in reality much higher, for it gives, without exception or deduction, except that of the tax for the poor, a clear twelfth part of the receipts for pieces in five acts, an eighteenth for three acts, and a twenty-fourth for one act. In the provinces the rights of authors are not less respected than in Paris. A numerous and influential society, which has followed the attempts at association made and sustained by Beaumarchais, extends its action and its superintendence in all directions. This society collects in Paris more than 800,000 francs for authors' fees, and 200,000 francs in the provinces, without reckoning various other proceeds which are estimated at 500,000 or 600,000 francs a-year. It defends the rights of its members, represses and punishes all frauds committed to their

prejudice, assists their widows and children, and supports them in their distress. This is the bright side of the Dramatic Authors' Society, but the medal has its reverse. This corporation has sometimes been accused of carrying its powers to excess, of usurping a despotic authority over the theatres, and of really constituting a commercial coalition which forbids its members, under the penalty of 6000 francs, to make private agreements with any theatre on conditions lower than it imposes; so that every director who refuses to subscribe to the wishes of the directing committee is laid under an interdict. At a given time and on a given day, as happened not long since, all the pieces of authors belonging to the Society are withdrawn from his répertoire, and he is thus obliged either to close his theatre or yield.

The theatres find that they have no longer to deal with an author who can exercise his own free will, but with a corporation, the collective wishes of which can be neither resisted, nor influenced.* It is true that the monopoly of the theatres, that is to say, the suppression of competition between directors, as established by the law of 1791, produced, as a natural consequence, a coalition of authors; but it must be added, that this coalition, in preventing its members

* See, as regards this question, M. Vivien's "Etudes administratives."

from writing for the theatres on lower terms than those which it fixed, ought, perhaps, to have joined to this prohibition a corresponding one; that is to say, it ought to have prevented authors from taking too great advantage of their position in respect to the theatres, and from obtaining, independently of the usual terms, exorbitant premiums and free admissions, which are sold at the door through the medium of the *chefs de claque*, and bring the author a supplementary sum, which on some occasions has exceeded fifty francs a night. In a word, ought not the Author's Society, which forbids its members to accept less than the price agreed upon, also to forbid them to exact more, and so give themselves up to speculations which seem scarcely conformable with the dignity of letters? We can here only indicate these questions; if we propose them, we do so only to contrast with the weak and difficult beginnings of the Dramatic Authors' Society, the state of prosperity which it enjoys at present. This contrast shows us what services were rendered by Beaumarchais, the constant aim of whose efforts was to ameliorate the condition of writers in general.

The inquiry would still have to be made, how much is good, and how much evil in this increase in the value of literary productions, in which the influence of Beaumarchais is apparent, as it is apparent in the origin of many other good and bad things of the present time.

The ardent advocate of the *droit d'auteur* in the eighteenth century, has been sometimes accused of contributing towards the development of the commercial spirit in literature: let us understand this. Beaumarchais did not make his century, he found it ready made; he found a society, in which the love of material welfare, although less developed than in the present day, was already strongly marked; in which wealth, which in the present day is everything, was beginning to equal and tending to eclipse all other influences. He had seen around him literary men who were poor, not from stoicism and from taste, like Rousseau (who in this respect was an exception in the midst of his time), but poor through ignorance as to the means of becoming richer; poor, in consequence of their inveterate habit of living meanly on ministerial pensions or presents obtained from the munificence of the great; poor, in short, from the impossibility of gaining sufficient profits by their works, which were brought out without tact by ignorant booksellers, or confiscated by rapacious actors, and published without being guaranteed against any kind of piracy. In this state of things Beaumarchais who, like Voltaire, had contrived to become rich independently of literature, but who did not admit, like Voltaire, that the man of letters, who is nothing else, was necessarily doomed to poverty, Beaumarchais thought, that under the protection of more just laws, with more ingenuity in the

means of entering into communication with the public, the literary profession might become an independent one, self-supporting, like many others, and capable of insuring, if not opulence, at all events comfort to a person exercising it with probity and talent. In this point of view Beaumarchais was quite right; he was going before his age, he was enunciating a bold opinion, which has now become an incontestable truth, when, in 1780, he wrote these lines to the Duke de Duras: "It is better, in my opinion, for a man of letters to live honestly by the acknowledged fruit of his labours, than to run after places or pensions, which he may long solicit without being able to obtain them." Who in the present day could doubt the correctness of Beaumarchais' opinion? The system under which the writer has no other master than the public, is in itself infinitely preferable to all others, not excepting the much vaunted patronage of Louis XIV. This magnificent patronage gave a pension of 3000 francs to Chapelain, who was styled "the greatest French poet that ever existed," and suppressed the meagre pension granted to Corneille; it payed Benserade a third more than Molière; it forced Mézeray to ask basely for pardon, when he had written according to his conscience, and to promise to "pass the sponge" over the truth, in order to obtain a renewal of his wages as historio-

grapher.* A very little money was divided between a few men of genius and a few mediocrities; outside these were a host of famished writers, of Colletets *crottés jusqu'à l'échine,* not less miserable and quite as unscrupulous as the lowest of the forlorn hope of contemporary literature,—that, taking it altogether, was the situation of men of letters under Louis XIV.†

* *Vide* two letters from Mézeray to Colbert, published by M. Taschereau, in his "Etudes sur Molière," p. 371.

† The liberality of Louis XIV. towards men of science and letters has been so much exaggerated, that it will, perhaps, not be useless to reproduce here some details which are seldom read, and which we borrow from the Memoirs of Charles Perrault, whose testimony on this point is the more valuable from the fact that he was himself one of Colbert's agents for distributing the grants in question. In giving us the sum of the royal bounty, Perrault at the same time shows us that these famous pensions, which it was said sought out merit, even to the extremities of Europe, were more the result of ostentation and caprice than of genuine liberality: "M. Colbert," says Perrault, "established a foundation of 100,000 livres, in the department of Public Buildings, for making grants to men of letters. All men of distinction, either in eloquence, poetry, mechanics, or the other sciences, in foreign countries, as well as in the kingdom, received gratuities. . . . Some of these pensions were paid in Italy, in Germany, in Denmark, in Sweden, and in the furthest extremities of the north; they were sent there by bills of exchange. With regard to those which were distributed in Paris, they were taken round the first year to all the recipients by the clerk of the treasurer of the buildings, in the nicest gold purses in the world; the second year in leather purses. As things cannot remain in the same state, and naturally decay with time, the following years it was necessary for the persons to go to the treasurers to receive the pen-

As I should not like the reader to misinterpret my meaning, I feel it necessary to make it as clear as possible. The majority of the great writers of the seventeenth century were not only men of admirable genius, but also of noble character. Without speaking of the illustrious priests of the time, whose moral rectitude may be looked upon as a consequence of their profession, almost all the great lay writers of the period, whether of poetry or prose, were distinguished by the dignity of their lives and the sincerity of their sentiments; simple and moderate in their tastes, occupied solely with doing what they had to do as well as possible, they sought above all the moral delights of reputation, the disinterested happiness of helping, each in the sphere of his abilities, to spread the love of the beautiful, the good, or the true. If they nearly all agreed in lauding the brilliant sovereign in whom their native land was personified, with an enthusiasm which may sometimes seem exaggerated, or in certain cases scarcely justified, they were not actuated by any low impulse of cupidity; they obeyed the general tendency of their century, they believed what they said, and

sions themselves in ordinary cash. The years soon began to consist of fifteen and sixteen months, and when war was declared against Spain, a large portion of these gratuities were stopped, and the only ones that were continued, were the pensions of the little Academy, and of the Academy of Sciences."—*Mémoires de Perrault*, liv. 1, p. 31.

would all have spoken of Louis XIV. dead, as they spoke of Louis XIV. living. The whole question consists in ascertaining whether the fine moral qualities which recommend the majority of these great literary geniuses to our respect, formed part of themselves, or may be more or less attributed to the particular conditions of existence which were provided for them, and in virtue of which the material welfare of those who had no personal fortune, depended less on the public than on the royal favour. To decide the question, it is sufficient, it appears to us, to consider that the system of royal pensions, combined with the system of individual gratuities on the part of great or rich men, was not applied only to the small number of writers of genius, but to the whole mass of the men of letters of the seventeenth century; and, to study as a consequence the effect of this system on the bearing and morality, not of a few men, but of the literary class in general. Now, if any one will take the trouble to examine closely into the lives, and relations with the upper classes of society, of all this mass of writers of the second or third rank, which are no more wanting to the seventeenth century than to any other epoch, he will discover without trouble, that the necessity which they experienced of deriving their subsistence from the generosity of the king, the minister, or some individual, developed in them

habits of mendicity, parasitism, venality, and vile, outrageous flattery, which with many of them went far beyond anything of the kind, however exorbitant, which the present position of literary men has produced.

The present state has, no doubt, its inconveniences. Transformed into a profession which can support itself, the profession of men of letters has encountered the danger of contact with and imitation of those pursuits whose only object is gain. As the influence of these pursuits is spreading from day to day, the result has been that this influence has too often affected literature, and that a state of society in which commercial people take the highest ground, has naturally produced a commercial literature. That in his ardent struggles on behalf of literary property, Beaumarchais, by laying too much stress on the idea of profit, helped to prepare this combination of literature and commerce; that he contributed his share towards the evils which this combination produces is possible; but what is certain is, that he worked with all his strength to procure for writers a system in which their existence should depend only upon themselves. And, if it be true that it never at any time was more easy than in the present day, for a laborious man, gifted with some talent, and moderate in his desires, to live by the proceeds of his pen,

to live by them honestly, without servility towards any one, without baseness, without flattery, without sacrifice of conscience, we have a right to say that Beaumarchais was not a stranger to this result, for to discover the means calculated to produce it was one of the great occupations of his life.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE COUNT DE LA BLACHE.—LAW-SUITS PRECEDING THE REVOLUTION.—MADAME DE SEVIGNE'S GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER. — GUDIN'S LIBELS. — GUDIN IN THE TEMPLE.—A DISCIPLE OF ROUSSEAU'S.—MADEMOISELLE NINON.

At the period when Beaumarchais was guiding the dramatic authors in the quarrel with the actors, which we have just related, relieved from the sentence passed upon him by the Maupeou Parliament, in the enjoyment of the brilliant success of "The Barber of Seville," possessing the intimate confidence of the government on the American question, well received at the court, and popular in general society, he might have been looked upon as a man who had at length conquered his bad fortune; but he was not yet free from all the fetters of the past. The first civil action against the Count de la Blache, which had been the origin of his tribulations and his celebrity, was still going on, and in the midst of his triumphs held his fortune and his honour in check.

The confidential agent of the ministry in the affair of the United States, the popular author of "The Barber," was under the effects of an unjust sentence, which in an indirect manner declared him guilty of forgery, and placed his property at an enemy's discretion. This was another discrepancy in his existence, which it was important he should put an end to; accordingly, before following him in his career of political agent and shipowner, we must show how he got rid of this eternal law-suit, the conclusion of which will furnish us with some rather curious details of manners.

The judgment given against Beaumarchais had been annulled by a decree of the grand council, at the end of 1775, and the affair sent before the Parliament of Provence. The Count de la Blache, seeing the influence of his adversary rapidly increasing, hurried the final decision with all his might. Beaumarchais used less haste in the matter. Occupied in organising his American scheme, and in freeing himself from the criminal imputation, he did not mean to bring the civil question to a final issue until he had secured his position, and provided himself with all the means of contesting advantageously with a *maréchal de camp*, who was rich, obstinate, and pushing. This will explain the following letter from the minister of foreign affairs, M. de Vergennes, to Beaumarchais, who had applied for a postponement,

and who, it will be seen, had already managed to establish a rather close connexion between his own affairs and those of the state.

"Versailles, June 2, 1776.

"I only received yesterday, Sir, your letter dated, I think by mistake, May 30th. I am no less surprised than yourself at hearing that a reporter has been appointed at Aix, in your affair with the Count de la Blache. I saw the keeper of the seals yesterday on the subject, and he immediately gave orders that M. de La Tour, the first president of the tribunal, should be written to to suspend all ulterior proceedings. The keeper of the seals is of opinion, for the rest, that the nomination of a reporter cannot be of any consequence. You are aware, Sir, of the sincere interest I take in all that regards you."

The note is without a signature, like many of M. de Vergennes' notes; but it is in his own handwriting, perfectly authentic, and gives us an idea of the amount of influence which Beaumarchais possessed in 1776.

A month after the date of this note, in August 1776, he lost one of his kindest and most powerful patrons, the Prince de Conti. This prince, whom Louis XIV. used to call *my cousin the advocate,* on account of his love of discussion and opposition, was, moreover, an *esprit fort.* On his death-bed he refused to receive the sacraments. If we are to believe Madame du Deffant, he persisted in his refusal, for she says: "The Prince de Conti has received the visit of the archbishop, and the exhortations of M. de

La Borde: *that is all he has received:*" but it would appear from Gudin's unpublished manuscript, that they succeeded in making him die in a more Christian manner, by adding to the exhortations of the Archbishop of Paris the weight of those of the author of "The Barber of Seville." "The Prince," says Gudin, "repelled all those persons who wished to prepare him for the mournful ceremonies of the Church. Beaumarchais was had recourse to. He loved the Prince, he knew how to treat the most important things with a gravity equal to the liveliness he exhibited in frivolous ones; he had the power of doing the most daring things without displeasing any one, and of bringing persons round to his opinions by unexpected means which only occurred to himself." Beaumarchais accordingly summoned up all his eloquence, and, by a somewhat strange contrast, the author of "The Barber" was seen associated with the Archbishop of Paris, in order to make a prince of the blood consent to receive extreme unction.*

* Gudin's narrative is rendered very probable by the connection between the Prince and Beaumarchais. In the papers of the latter, I have found more than one trace of this connection. On this subject, I will only quote an unpublished letter from Beaumarchais to the Prince, which exhibits much familiarity, and in which a request for two bottles of wine is made in a lively and original manner.

"Monseigneur,—Yesterday evening, I was praising your Highness's great qualities; I was vaunting especially your munificence, and

At the same epoch, an incident relative to his law-suit at Aix furnished Beaumarchais with the opportunity of writing one of the best letters which ever came from his pen. The wife of one of the presidents of the Parliament of Provence, Madame de St. Vincent, a great grand-daughter of Madame de Sévigné's, was gravely compromised in an action of the most scandalous nature, which was being tried at Paris between this lady, the Duke de Richelieu, and some

employing with this object that redoubtable multitude of synonymes used by one of your servants, in order to prove that you, Monseigneur, were not only the most generous prince, but the most generous man I knew, when a wretch—may Lucifer confound him—replied coldly, that it was all very well to talk like that; but that he was sure your serene Highness would let a Christian die under a hedge like a dog, for want of a bottle of Romanée.' 'Vile calumniator,' said I, disdainfully. 'Say scandal-bearer, that is all that I am,' answered he. 'Monseigneur, I cannot suffer the reputation of a great Prince to be destroyed in my presence, and I have formed a plan of revenge, which shall not even be deferred till to-morrow, if your Highness does not consider it too cruel. I have challenged the traitor to dine with me at four o'clock; he suspects nothing. Our intention is to drink the bottle of Romanée before his face, and to break the bottle on the nape of his neck, and if the first blow does not kill him on the spot, to repeat it with the second bottle. Let your servants act, Monseigneur, you have only to arm them. May the traitor be, as we have said elsewhere, crushed beneath the shields of the Samnites. The bearer of this letter, with the hamper on his shoulders, is commissioned to await the orders of your Highness.

"I am, with inexhaustible zeal, your serene Highness's very humble and obedient servant,

"BEAUMARCHAIS.

"Sunday, 5th February, 1755."

other persons of less lofty rank. The decay of governments is always marked by law-suits of this kind. They abounded in France in the year which preceded the Revolution of '89. The cause of the present one was nothing less than 240,000 francs' worth of fraudulent bills, which the Duke de Richelieu accused Madame de St. Vincent of having forged and negotiated in his name, while that lady, who had been separated from her husband for some time, and had maintained guilty relations with the Duke de Richelieu, accused him in her turn of having deceived her, and of having given her the notes himself, knowing that they were forged. The Marshal of France, when implicated in such an affair, was seventy-eight years of age.*

Madame de St. Vincent was a prisoner at the Con-

* On the death of this old libertine, who was a member of the French Academy, and whom Voltaire called "my hero," a grave historian, Gaillard, then Director of the Academy, replying in the name of the body to the Duke d'Harcourt, who succeeded the Duke de Richelieu, praised the latter in terms which seem incredible when read in Grimm's correspondence, and which paint a whole epoch. After having called the deceased a French Alcibiades, and having compared him to a demi-god, whose faith offered everywhere is received in a hundred places, the learned and elegant Director of the Academy continued his mythological parallel thus: "The Helens, the Peribœas, the Ariadnes, and so many others, whose names have even escaped his memory, dazzled by his glory, alarmed by his graces, seek to make his conquest, deplore his inconstancy; all prefer him, all are preferred." It was thus that an academician was praised in the year of grace 1789, on the eve of the Revolution.

ciergerie, when she heard from her lawyer that Beaumarchais visited the Duke de Richelieu; the cause of these visits was the dispute with the actors, of which we have already given an account. Madame de St. Vincent persuaded herself that Beaumarchais, in order to be agreeable to the Duke, intended to write in his name a Memorial against herself, and in order to dispose of this imaginary danger, she wrote to him from the Conciergerie a letter, in which something of her illustrious ancestor's wit will be recognised. How heart-breaking for Madame de Sévigné, the most amiable, the most lively, but the most decorous of women, if, returning to the world, she could have seen one of her descendants at the Conciergerie, frightfully compromised in every manner, and writing to Beaumarchais, with a levity which her horrible position rendered unbecoming, the following letter:—

"I can see you from where I am, preparing your pen, that charming pen, which ought never to have been employed except for praising the graces, and celebrating the muses; however, Sir, you are about to use it against me; and when you have accomplished your task, under what laurel-tree do you think of reposing? In what Jordan will you purify that pen, sullied with innocent blood? All the *cordons-bleus*, all the Marshals of France, will fail to justify you; I have only one hope, it is that the Holy Spirit, which breathes where it wills, will not inspire you with the slightest thought, or the slightest phrase; you will then be obliged to have recourse to the devil, and in that case you will remember your Catechism

sufficiently to know that with the sign of the cross we can make your Memorial disappear. You have commenced one against M. de Vedel,* I am aware, and it will be vain to deny it. I know the style of the Marshal's advocate; if a Memorial appears, and if I do not yawn at the first page, sleep at the second, and end by throwing it all out of the window, I shall say, 'It has been written, composed, and printed by M. de Beaumarchais.' Then, I shall also mend my pen, and you will have your answer from me, Sir.

"In the meanwhile, as you still appear to me an estimable man, with whom I should not refuse to be confronted, although I would give a great deal not to be Madame Goëzman, "I have the honour to be, Sir,

"Your very humble and very obedient servant,

"VENCE DE SAINT-VINCENT.

"At the Conciergerie, Saturday."

This letter was embarrassing to Beaumarchais: the person who wrote it was the wife of one of the presidents of the Parliament before which his law-suit with the Count de la Blache was about to be decided. He was ignorant at the time that the President de Saint-Vincent, who had long been separated from his wife in consequence of her misconduct, took no sort of interest in her; he feared that this erroneous idea of Madame de Saint-Vincent's, might exercise a pernicious influence on his law-suit at Aix; for, independently of the position of her

* One of the persons compromised with Madame de Saint-Vincent in the accusation of forgery. The assertion of the lady was otherwise entirely incorrect.

husband, this lady was allied to several of the great parliamentary families of Provence; he was therefore anxious to dissuade her from such an idea, and was also anxious not to set the Duke de Richelieu against him, in case Madame de Saint-Vincent should show his answer; and he at the same time desired to explain to a lady of quality, whose reputation was far from being perfect, and who was accused of a crime of which she was afterwards found guilty,* that her gaiety was not quite in harmony with her position. All this required much tact, and as this quality was not the most marked of those possessed by Beaumarchais, the reader will perhaps be pleased to find it in his answer to Madame de Sevigné's great granddaughter:—

"You have been ill-informed, Madame; some theatrical business caused me to visit Marshal de Richelieu, whence M. Blondel has concluded too hastily that there was some question of my writing Memorials. I am not an advocate, and in so grave an affair the Marshal would rather look for a man of law to say things, than a man of letters to make phrases.

"For my own part, Madame, I am behind-hand with the Count de la Blache to the extent of a thick Memorial, which he has just published at Aix, where our action has been removed. I have on my desk the materials for a petition to the court of peers, directed against the court without peers,

* I believe she was not formally found guilty, but the notes of which she claimed the payment from the Duke de Richelieu were declared null.

which blamed me for being in the right; and M. Blondel thinks I can mix myself up with the squabbles of other persons, when my whole time is insufficient for my own: that is neither probable nor true.

"No, Madame, I have commenced no Memorial against M. de Vedel; I shall produce none against yourself, and I have not received any application on the subject, either from the Marshal or from any one else. I would not, for the whole world, use my pen in support of a resentment to which I was a stranger; and, as you well remark, Madame, no reflected inspiration could furnish me with either thoughts or expressions; indeed, it is only with the most lively regret that I have sometimes been forced to employ my pen against my personal enemies. Besides, a law-suit of such deep import as yours, requires a tone which I sincerely desire I may never have to employ against any one. There is my profession of faith. I am as sensible as possible of all the polite and obliging things you say; but although I have infinite esteem for the mental strength which maintains the unfortunate in their oppression, it was not without some grief that I saw so much wit, grace, and gaiety shining in the midst of so great a misfortune, and issuing from so sad a place as that which you inhabit.

"The feeling which guides my pen will prove to you, better than all the liveliness in the world, how little I think of exhibiting any to your disadvantage, and I have the honour to be, Madame, with respect, &c.

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

Delayed by the numerous affairs which Beaumarchais was directing all at once, the last and decisive battle between the Count de La Blachè and himself was decided at Aix, in July 1778. The author of "The Barber of Seville," accompanied by the faithful

Gudin, started for Provence; he was going at the same time to send two vessels off from Marseilles to the United States, and to come to a conclusion at Aix with the most determined of his adversaries.

The Memorials published in Provence by Beaumarchais have been reprinted in his works, so that we need not occupy ourselves with them. In the midst of many inequalities they contain passages which are not inferior to the best which occur in the Memorials against Goëzman; the general tone is so audacious, that in spite of the cleverness, it sometimes borders upon the boastful. We feel that we are reading the production of a man who is conscious of his power, who is directing important operations, who enjoys great celebrity, and considers his social importance as equal, at least, to that of a *maréchal de camp*. There are some pages, the opening, for instance, of the Memorial entitled *le Tartare à la légion*, in which the style of the satirical pamphlet, with all its merits and defects, is adopted in a masterly manner, and which recall the most severe, animated, daring specimens of the class.

The town of Aix appeared, then, to be predestined as the scene of celebrated law-suits. In the same place where Mirabeau was soon to make the first outbursts of his eloquence heard, was seen to glitter the sparkling *verve* of the author of "The Barber of

Seville," of the conqueror of the Maupeou Parliament. In vain had the Count de La Blache surrounded himself by six advocates, and prepared his victory long beforehand; Beaumarchais' pen acted rapidly on the provençal heads. At the expiration of a few days the public were gained over. "You have turned the whole town," said his solicitor to him. His triumph was complete, and a final judgment freed him for ever from the Count de La Blache. The intoxicating effect of this triumph, after so many years of uncertainty and struggles, and the provençal enthusiasm with which he was received, are described by an eye-witness, in an unpublished letter written from Aix by Gudin, and which appears to us sufficiently interesting to be reproduced.

"D'Aix, July 23, 1778.

"Beaumarchais has at last gained his action at Aix. The case has been decided unanimously in his favour, with expenses and damages, *Le Falcoz** being upset in all his demands and claims as unfounded and *calumnious;* this word is in the judgment. The affair has been examined and discussed here with particular attention, and the questions of law have been treated with a clearness and depth which must

* M. de La Blache was named Falcoz de La Blache. In now taking leave of this obstinate antagonist of Beaumarchais, as we do not altogether espouse the quarrels of the author of "The Barber of Seville," we must state that Count Falcoz de La Blache, who belonged, by the father's side, to a distinguished family in Dauphiné, afterwards figured honourably in the constituent assembly, as deputy of the nobility of his province.

do honour to the bar of the town. Le Falcoz exhibited prodigious activity and excessive skill; every day he went out at five o'clock in the morning, visited all his judges, went round to his six advocates, and showed himself everywhere. Beaumarchais did quite the contrary; he saw no one, he did not even go to his judges. I scolded him for it sometimes; but he replied to me like the Misanthrope, 'Ma cause n'est-elle pas bonne?' By way of replying to one of Falcoz's pleas, which set forth, with inconceivable impudence, that Beaumarchais had never been connected with M. Duverney, Beaumarchais let off at him the Memorial, which you must have received, 'Réponse ingénue,' &c. Le Falcoz, seconded by Châtillon and six advocates, having presented his petition to have the said Mémorial burnt by the hands of the executioner, and having published another Memorial, and another consultation, signed by the six, Beaumarchais replied to them by another document, which you are not yet acquainted with, entitled 'Le Tartare à la légion.' He treats them therein like a genuine Tartar, except that he ridicules them with more liveliness than there ever was in the whole of Scythia. While he was thus amusing himself, and laughing with his counsel, numerous advocates of the town communicated to him and his advocate, and even printed, statements which proved that he had on his side both the law and the authority of all the commentators of laws. The judges maintained the most profound silence, and examined the affair with a severity calculated to confound all rash individuals. Our Tartar asked to be allowed to speak to his assembled judges and to communicate with them all together; but as he claimed no advantage over his adversary, he asked the same favour for him. This was granted to them; and as they both speak well, the two sittings were very interesting. But the loftiness, the confidence, the frank manner of stating facts, and the good reasons which our Tartar exhibited, could not fail to influence the minds of all, which were in no way dazzled by the

subtleness of his adversary, who was heard after him. Public opinion, which had been prejudiced during the last two years by the publication of Falcoz's consultation, and during the last two months by his visits, his speeches, his uniform, his title, and his allegations, had been suddenly taken from him by the vigorous replies of the Tartar. There now only remained to him a weak party, composed of persons who were obstinately attached to the nobility, or to their own interests. The whole town, which lives upon law-suits, was in a state of expectation and impatience. The judges were deliberating, the doors of the court were besieged; the women, and all who were curious or interested about the matter, were beneath the long avenue of trees not far from the court; the idlers filled the cafés, which are on each side of this promenade. Le Falcoz was in his drawing-room, which was well lighted up, and looks upon this avenue; our friend was in a very distant quarter. Night approached, at last the doors of the court were opened, these words were heard: 'Beaumarchais has won.' A thousand voices repeated them, clapping of hands spread all along the walk, the windows and doors of Le Falcoz were suddenly closed, the multitude, with shouts and acclamations, reached the residence of our friend; men, women, the persons with whom he was acquainted, and those with whom he was not acquainted, embraced, felicitated, and congratulated him. This universal joy, these shouts, these transports affected him, tears overtook him, and at last, like a great child, he fell into our arms and fainted away. There was a general contest as to who should succour him, who should give him vinegar, a smelling bottle and air; but, to use his own words, the sweet effects of joy do no harm; he soon recovered, and we went together to see and thank the first president. This magistrate, with the noble severity of the head of an august tribunal, reproached him with the aggressiveness of his Memorials. He was right: as a man, one must approve of them; as a magistrate, it is impossible

to do so conscientiously. In fact, they had appeared so lively to the Parliament, that it had been unable to avoid condemning the second to be torn up, not by the hand of an executioner, as this Falcoz desired, but by that of an officer of the court, which is a very different thing. By way of teaching him to be so amusing another time, he was condemned, in addition to the destruction of his Memorial, to give a thousand crowns to the poor of the town, and he has given them two thousand by way of congratulating them, he said, 'on having such good and virtuous magistrates.' Falcoz's Memorials have also been suppressed. On returning from the house of the first president, we found the same crowd at the door; tambourines, flutes, and violins came in succession before and after supper. All the faggots of the quarter were heaped together and made into a bonfire. Persons of reading said, as they passed beneath the windows:

'Montrez Héraclius au peuple qui l'attend.'

"The ladies who were in his apartments wished to enjoy the sight, and obliged our friend to come to the window and not to be modestly cruel towards people who had shown him so much good will. The workmen of the town have composed a song in honour of him, in provençal *patois*, and sang it to him in a body beneath his windows. Every heart shared in his delight, and every one is enchanted with him and treats him as a celebrated man, to whose probity the justice which was his due has at length been paid."

Not contented with celebrating the triumph of his friend in prose, Gudin also wished to sing his praises in verse, and to his misfortune he did so. On his return to Paris, he composed a long epistle to Beaumarchais, the opening of which was as follows:

"Thus the severe justice of the Parliament
Has confounded the malice of thy enemies;

They flattered themselves, however, that their dark heart
Which, of a *vile senator* in unfortunate times
Had influenced the venal balance,
Would surprise the prudence of our true magistrates."

This masterpiece, containing a hundred verses, was inserted in the French journal, the "Courrier de l'Europe," which was published in London, and which changed the text, substituting for "vile senator," "profane senate," &c., so that the personal allusion to the judge Goëzman, who had principally contributed to Beaumarchais' losing his first action against the Count de La Blache, became changed into an allusion to the whole of the Maupeou Parliament. Now the greater part of the members of this judicial body, as has been already stated, on the dissolution of Parliament re-entered the grand council from which Maupeou had taken them. The grand council then was *de facto*, if not *de jure*, identified with the Maupeou Parliament; it had undergone the attacks of the author of "The Barber," without saying a word, not daring to risk a quarrel with so rude a combatant, who had otherwise just causes of complaint against him; but on hearing that the inoffensive Gudin had taken the liberty of calling the defunct Maupeou Parliament "a profane senate," it took the opportunity of making an example and of thrashing Beaumarchais on the back of his friend. Beaumarchais was absent from Paris; he had gone to

La Rochelle, whence he was sending off fresh vessels to the United States, when an order for his friend's arrest, which was issued without any previous notice, suddenly arrived and took the peaceful Gudin by surprise; but let him narrate his adventure himself, in which Beaumarchais will soon be seen to take a part.

"I was thinking of no harm," says Gudin, "and thought myself in perfect safety, when one day at my own house, sitting between my mother and my niece, I received a short note from Madame Denis, niece of the late M. de Voltaire. She was very fond of me on account of the extreme attachment I had always had for her uncle. 'An order for your arrest,' she informed me, 'has just been issued by the grand council; you are on the point of being taken, on account of some verses printed in the "Courrier de l'Europe." You have not an instant to lose.'

"I did not lose one. I had read this note to myself, and leaving the table without saying a word, I went into my dressing-room, dressed myself hastily, and took refuge with Beaumarchais. I read the note to Madame de Beaumarchais. I sent for my friend M. T——, and M. Genée de Brochot, a very experienced lawyer. We held a council. My first care was to commission my friend to inform my mother of the strange visit she was about to receive from the officers of the grand council, and to explain it to her, to beg her not to be alarmed, and to reply that she did not know where I was, and that I was possibly with Beaumarchais at a hundred leagues distance from Paris.

"Genée de Brochot advised me not to allow myself to be taken. 'These gentlemen of the grand council, hating Beaumarchais cordially as they do, might very well,' he said, 'take vengeance for his Memorials upon his friend, and be very expeditious in condemning him, since they have begun by

issuing a warrant for his arrest without making any accusation against him, which is a violation of all laws.'

"I took his advice, and with due deliberation, as soon as night had fallen, I went out by a little door which opened into a bye-street, and, well escorted by two or three friends, took refuge within the precints of the Temple.

"This château, with its vast grounds, which Philippe le Bel took so scandalously from the Templars, and which was afterwards given up to the Knights of Malta, was then, thanks to the privileges of this order, an asylum not for criminals, but for all persons who, without having committed any grave offence, were, nevertheless, in some dilemma, such as being in debt, or the object of some exceptional accusation, such, in a word, as had happened to me.*

"The custom was, on arriving, to inscribe one's name on the registers of the Bailiff of the Temple; he asked me 'what cause had induced me to claim the privileges of the locality. Is it for debt?' 'I have no debts.' 'A duel?' 'My enemies, if I have any, have never attacked me except with their pens.' 'Some quarrel at cards—some affair with women?' 'I never play—I never either interfered with the peace of a family, or created a disturbance in a house of ill-fame.' 'For what reason, then?' 'For some verses, which important personages do not approve of; verses printed, I know not how, in London, denounced, I know not why, in Paris, and which the grand council, without having any authority over books, or over what takes place in England, declares to be offensive to a tribunal which no longer exists, because they contain an eulogium on a man whom these equitable magistrates would like never to have praised.'

"He did not hesitate to grant me the asylum I de-

* It is not very generally known that the quarter of the Temple, which now forms the principal quarter of the Paris old-clothes-men, was, in 1778, still a place of asylum.

manded. 'But,' he said, 'the custom is, for those who come here to change their name; what do you wish to be called?' 'La Blanc, for I am spotless, and I claim still to be considered so, in spite of all the denunciators, and all the censors, either of the law-courts or of the journals, who are all somewhat inclined to form an opinion without sufficient previous information, in spite of its being required by law and reason.' 'Where will you reside?' 'In the very small apartment which the beautiful Madame de Goodville occupies, within your precincts.' 'You will not be badly off here; she is a very beautiful woman, and possesses much wit.'* I in fact found in her company the most agreeable asylum man was ever destined to meet with in this world; she was in the Temple for her debts, and we did not cease laughing when we thought we were lodging together, she, by a decree of the Châtelet, and I by a decree of the grand council.'

"This appeared so amusing to us, that the day afterwards we wrote about it to M. de Sartines, with whom she was very well acquainted; we sent him some rather droll epigrams which we composed together about my affair. We were not anxious to conceal either my conduct or my retreat from the minister or his friend the lieutenant of police; and we continued our little clandestine correspondence during the entire period of my seclusion.

"Beaumarchais, on his return to Paris, heard of my adventure, was justly indignant, came to fetch me, and took me to his house. 'You may be sure,' he said to me, 'that they will not arrest you either in my carriage or in my house.'

* It seems to us that the ingenuous Gudin, who was just speaking to us of his virtue, is now exhibiting a great deal of levity. Apparently, this Madame Goodville, whose habitation he shared, was, on her side, a woman of light conduct, from whose influence he derives this slightly conceited tone, which is rather unusual with him.

"He went to see M. de Maurepas, and told him that I was about to make a complaint to the Parliament against the grand council; that as my affair compromised one of these two great tribunals with the other, it would cause a still greater noise than his own. 'That is not the thing to do,' replied the Count de Maurepas, 'and we will soon annul this decree *ab irato*.'"

At the end of some days, indeed, Beaumarchais had rescued friend Gudin from his predicament, and nothing represents his position at this epoch better than the tone of his letters to the ministers, and particularly to the keeper of the seals.

"Monseigneur," he writes to him, "I have the honour to send you the petition addressed to the King's Council by my friend M. Gudin de la Brenellerie, who unites with the most attractive genius the simplicity of a child, of Candide, and whom, as protector of letters in France, you would esteem worthy of all your benevolence, if he had, moreover, the honour of being known to you."

Gudin obtained, in the first instance, his provisional liberty; and Beaumarchais continued his efforts in the following letter:—

"Paris, December 28, 1778.

"Monseigneur,—In returning you my very humble thanks for the provisional liberty which the king has granted to M. Gudin de la Brenellerie, permit me to solicit a final decree for quashing and annulling the strange decree of the grand council.

"This tribunal, more strange even than its decree, had

ordered its officers to make a minute search through all the papers of my friend, in order to try to find something which would give it a hold upon me; they have proved that this was the case; but finding nothing of mine at his house, excepting an engraving of my portrait, they were foolish enough in describing, even to the glasses, frames, and print, which ornamented his room, to put in the annotation to the engravings these words: '*and especially a print, representing M. Caron de Beaumarchais.*'

"'Certainly, my dear *huissier* thou art right,' I said, when I read the word 'especially.' My portrait is 'especially' a *souvenir* of the most cruel reproach that could be made to the wretched tribunal with which the grand council is good-natured enough to identify itself. It is myself, then, 'especially' Monseigneur, whom these gentlemen are pursuing in the person of my friend.

"If I had had to plead the cause of M. Gudin before them, as good a logician as they are unjust magistrates, I should have addressed to them three Latin expressions: 'Is it as grand council, gentlemen, that you attack me? I hold no office under your jurisdiction, *nescio vos!* Is it as the natural judges of printed works? You are not the Parliament; *non bis in idem.* Is it, in fine, as the sad manes of a buried Parliament? What do you wish of me, plaintive shades? *non mortui laudabunt me, Domine;* so much for the deceased: *Neque omnes qui descendunt in infernum;* so much for those who defend it.'

"If they had considered that my defence showed too much levity, I would have replied to them in a more serious strain, that it showed much less than the indiscreet decree by which they had arrogated the right of interfering with the person and liberty of a citizen.

"Monseigneur, you owe it to the king's justice, to your own, and above all to your love of peace, to prevent once for all this restless tribunal from perpetually finding subjects for

quarrels about jurisdiction between the Parliament of Paris and itself.

"I am with the profoundest respect, Monseigneur, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

In the same month in which Beaumarchais delayed for a moment his operations as a fitter-out of ships, in order to snatch his friend Gudin from the claws of the grand council, he received from Aix the following letter, which will give us an idea of the moral and intellectual state of a young girl of the eighteenth century, who has made too deep a study of the "Nouvelle Hélöise."

"D'Aix, December 1, 1778.

"A young person overwhelmed beneath the weight of her sorrows, addresses you in search of consolation. Your heart, which is known to her, emboldens her in taking the step which she ventures upon, and which would appear unbecoming if she had addressed any one but yourself. But, are you not M. de Beaumarchais, and am I not to hope that you will deign to take up my case, and direct the conduct of a young girl who is without experience? I am, myself, this unfortunate person who comes to you to pour her troubles into your bosom; deign to open it to me, allow yourself to be moved by the narration of my sufferings. . . . . Ah, if there are hard hearts, yours is not of the number.

"You will be doubtless astonished, Sir, that without having the honour of being known to you, I address myself to you in a direct manner; but only accuse yourself if you have gained the good-will of every one. There is not one sensitive heart who, in reading you, has not been filled with admiration, and felt as if drawn towards you by an invincible attraction. You behold in myself one of your most zealous ad-

mirers. What prayers have I not uttered for you, at a time when you had everything to fear from the injustice of men! Why can I not represent to you the joy I felt on learning that the justice you deserved had at last been rendered to you?

"Shall I tell you, Sir, that I feel a confidence in you, which is not ordinary? You cannot be offended by it; my heart tells me to follow its inspirations. It tells me that you will not refuse me your assistance. Yes, you will help me, you will sustain oppressed innocence; it is to you this glory belongs. I am forsaken by a man to whom I have sacrificed myself. I find myself the victim of seduction without having abandoned myself to it. I confess with tears, and not with blushes, that I have yielded to love, to sentiment, but not to vice and licentiousness, which is so common in this depraved century. I have deplored, even in the arms of my lover, the loss I was undergoing. The more tears I shed over this painful sacrifice, the more merit I appeared to have in consummating it. Yes, I venture to say, that in the very bosom of love I have preserved the purity of my heart."

Here the young girl in question devotes herself, with details too animated to bear reproduction, to the development of a sophism, imitated from Rousseau, which consists in demonstrating that she is more virtuous in intention, in proportion as she has been less virtuous in fact.

"I have struggled a long time," she says, "I was unable to conquer myself. The cruel privation imposed upon me has lasted too long. Live five years without seeing a man one adores, ah! it is *not in nature* to do so." But obedience to the "laws

of nature" has produced a social result of the most lamentable kind.

"I enjoyed a certain respect," she adds; "he has deprived me of it. I am only seventeen, and am already ruined in reputation. With a pure heart and virtuous inclinations, I am to be despised by every one. I cannot bring myself to such an idea, it overwhelms me and drives me to despair. No, I will not be the victim of the knave who was base enough to take advantage of so much love. What ingratitude! From the age of twelve I had devoted to him my most tender affections; I would have shed the very last drop of my blood to insure his happiness! Alas! I feel that he is yet dear to me. I cannot live without him. He must be my husband, and shall! If I were free, I should at this moment be at the foot of the throne. My youth, my misfortunes, my face, which is not disagreeable, everything, would plead for me; but imprisoned, so to speak, by a father and mother, who will never lose sight of me, I can undertake nothing without their consent. God save them from ever knowing of my adventure! I should be lost; and besides, they would oppose my designs. What should I become? Ah, Sir, lend me your aid, extend to me your generous hand, make consolation and hope revive in my oppressed heart. I do not wish to cause any trouble to my deceiver; no, I love him too much. I should desire to make my complaint at the foot of the throne. If you deign to assist me, I have every hope. You have influence, Sir; you know the minister, he treats you with consideration. Who, indeed, could refuse that consideration which is so justly due to you? Tell him, Sir, that a young person who implores your assistance, implores his protection, that she groans and sighs night and day; she asks only for justice. . . . . As I wish my parents not to be made acquainted with my intention, I only know of one thing which could serve my

purpose, which is to obtain a *lettre de cachet* for taking me to Versailles alone, only with the permission, if this favour were granted to me, of taking a lady's maid. I am getting on very quickly, you will say; but a person who loves, thinks of everything. I hear marriage mentioned. If he marries, what will become of me. I can make no opposition to it. I can only put forward my love. He does not appear to be sufficiently sensible of it, for me to hope I can touch his heart. I think, however, I may say, without presumption, that I am not unworthy of his affection. He must, after all, do me justice. He only opposes to my happiness, my fortune; this is not sufficiently considerable to arrange his affairs, which are not in very good order. He has no aversion for me. There is nothing in me to inspire it. The only crime of which I have been guilty towards him, is that of loving him too much. Do not abandon me, Sir: I place my destiny in your hands! Deign to pronounce my sentence; deign to restore me to life. You alone can make me value an existence which my sorrows cause me to detest. If you do me the favour of answering me, you must have the kindness to address your letter to M. Vitalis, Rue du Grand-Horloge, at Aix, and above the address, simply: to Mademoiselle Ninon. You will kindly pardon me, Sir, if I still conceal my name from you. Do not attribute it, I implore you, to a want of confidence on my part. I am aware of your probity. I know, yes, I know that I have nothing to fear; but a fear, a certain fear which I cannot overcome, which I cannot define, still holds me back. You have acquaintances in Aix. I am very well known there. In small towns people hear everything; you know how spiteful they are. I beg of you to admit no one into the secret which I have taken the liberty of confiding to you.

"Not knowing your address, I ask M. Mathieu* for it; who, from my maintaining an incognito, made some difficul-

* Beaumarchais' solicitor, in his law-suit at Aix.

ties about giving it to me. He might write to you to this effect; you are well acquainted with him. . . . . I should be afraid of offending you, if I were to finish. No, no, I have nothing to apprehend from you.

"Sir, I have the honour to be, with feelings of the most perfect consideration,

"Your very humble and very obedient servant,

"NINON."

Only imagine such a letter falling suddenly, from two hundred leagues distance, into the hands of a man of forty-six, a man who was more occupied than any other person in France and Navarre, a man who has to hold conferences every morning with ministers, who has forty ships on the seas, who is carrying on a contest against the actors, who is preparing a pamphlet against the English Government, who is engaged in establishing the Bank of Discount and the Chaillot Fire Engine, who is contemplating an edition of Voltaire, who is conducting a dozen enterprises at the same time. For a certainty such a man will throw the lamentations of an unknown young girl into the waste-paper basket. Nothing of the kind; Beaumarchais finds time for everything. Here is his answer to Mademoiselle Ninon.

"Paris, December 19, 1778.

"If, my young unknown, you are the author of the letter I have received from you, I must conclude that your wit is equal to your sensibility; but your position and your grief are as well represented in this letter as the service you expect from me is the contrary. Your heart deceives you when it

counsels you to take so violent a step as that you would venture to undertake; and although your misfortune may secretly interest all persons of feeling, it does not belong to a class for which a remedy can be sought at the foot of the throne. Accordingly, amiable and witty Ninon, you must give up a plan the inutility of which would be evident to you, were it not for your inexperience. But let us see in what manner I can serve you. A half confession leads to nothing, and if the true circumstances were told to me in a very frank avowal, they might perhaps suggest the means of removing the obstacles which separate your lover from so charming a girl; but remember that while asking me to keep the secret, you have not told me anything. If you sincerely think me as honourable a man as you say, you should not hesitate to confide to me your name, that of your lover, his calling, your own, his disposition, his kind of ambition, and the difference in fortune which seems to keep him away from the girl whom he has deceived. It is also necessary that I should know what you expect to gain from your parents by remaining silent, or by making a confession to them. Among whom does your deceiver live? On what point do you think he can be attacked? In selecting me for your advocate, you must also think me worthy of being your confessor. What circumstances can have caused his absence for five years? How did you see one another again? By what hope, by what promises were you induced to grant the last favours? The idea of concealing a friend in order to render him witness of his triumph, gives me a slight horror for the person who still inspires you with love.* Thoughtlessness can be pardoned in a young man; he may be brought round by a thousand means; but, *ma belle*, what can be said to a man whose heart is atrocious, to a man who has delighted in

* An allusion to a piece of infamy, which Mademoiselle Ninon accused her lover of having designed, and the details of which I have suppressed in her long letter.

dishonouring one who had accorded him her preference, and who had given herself up to him on the faith of his love and honour? This young man appears to me equally unworthy of your regrets and of our united efforts, whatever they might be. Look at the matter yourself, exert your strength against so ill-placed an inclination. Virtue does not consist in lavishing love upon an unworthy object, but in overcoming the love we feel for an object which is unworthy. For the rest, I can only apply general precepts to a particular misfortune, all the details of which are unknown to me. Your happiness will perhaps proceed from your very imprudence; your unworthy lover can derive no real advantage from any trace of your weakness. I am supposing, moreover, that he has no letters of yours. Forget him, my fair client; and may this unhappy experience of yourself, keep you on your guard against any other seduction of the same kind; or if your little heart, led away by the charm of the past, is disinclined to the austerity of such advice, open to me this heart entirely, and let me see if, after considering all the circumstances, I can derive from them any consolation to offer you, any prospect which you may find useful and agreeable.

"I promise you the most thorough discretion, and I conclude, without addressing you any compliment, because the frankest manner is most likely to inspire you with the confidence. But conceal nothing from me.

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

Mademoiselle Ninon wished for nothing more than to solace her poor heart. She addressed to Beaumarchais an avalanche of letters, some of which were not less than twelve pages long; she tells her own name, the name of her seducer, and narrates the whole of her little romance with a strange mixture of naïveté, precocity, sometimes effrontery, sensibility,

wit and volubility. This provençale girl of seventeen appears truly saturated with the "Nouvelle Héloïse;" she makes use of similar exclamations. "Fatal house," she says, speaking of the house in which she first saw her lover, "thou art the cause of all my misfortunes!" She also exhibits the same contradictions; she chooses to make confessions on the most delicate subjects, by protesting incessantly that if she has departed from the path of virtue, it has enabled her to feel all the more the value of a pure and virtuous heart. "Beloved innocence," she cries, "what has become of you? Can I have lost you? Oh! no, no. I have searched to the innermost corner of my heart, it is too sensitive, but it is still pure. In mercy, Sir, do not think it corrupt."

In these letters, which are of an unequal and very singular tone, there is a sort of reflection of Rousseau's novel. We see the false conception of the Genevese philosopher, which while leading astray the head of a very gifted young girl, becomes combined with sincere and ingenuous impulses which make us feel an attachment for her. Thus speaking of her lover, she writes: "I saw him constantly. What progress a love, with which I was not yet acquainted, was making in my heart! So young, ought I not to have been exempt from it? At the age of twelve, ought so terrible a passion to be known?" Further on we find her saying with naïveté, "This man had the heart of a tiger!"

and again, "Ah! Sir, the critical moment is now arriving;" and all this is interspersed with philosophical reflections, in which Rousseau always appears under the form of a little Provençale girl of seventeen. Thus, for instance, in order to justify her grand plan of leaving her father and mother to go to Versailles, and speak to the king, she wrote to Beaumarchais the following letter, in which I only suppress those passages whose naïveté is rather too daring. There are always some of these passages in Mademoiselle Ninon's letters.

"Aix, January 25, 1779.

"What a painful task, Sir, I have to fulfil! I have to justify a step which appears to you devoid of prudence and good sense; I have to convince you of the importance of the design which you discountenance. Presumptuous girl, how great is thy rashness, and what am I undertaking! Attempt to justify what you, you, Sir, have condemned! Ah, never mind! I will write it. You will permit me? You will pardon me? Come, then, I am reassured. In the first place, I should not have undertaken what I dared to communicate to you, for myself alone. Three objects attracted me to the foot of the throne. The glory of my king, that of my sex, and my own reputation. We have too long been the unfortunate victims of the perfidy of men. Their despotism increases more and more every day, and what is more cruel is, that they succeed by their seductions, in making us both sacrificers and victims. To whom do we sacrifice ourselves? Is it to men? No, to savages, who take advantage and ridicule incessantly the weakness and credulity of a sex which adores them in spite of the cruel persistence with which they persecute it. They no longer blush at anything. They

will not blush to employ every means to seduce a virtuous girl whom they ought to respect. They force her away from virtue, which before knowing them she cherished and revered. And what is the reward for so painful a sacrifice? The disdain which they heap upon us; that is all we have to hope for, let us expect nothing more. Honour! what is that to them? a vain chimera. Honour, what a fine word! It sounds well to the ear, but how little does it fill the heart. There is no honour, it no longer exists. Where is that happy time when a girl could make a rampart of her lover himself, in which he deigned to be the support of her virtue? * We were respected; this is the case no longer. We have no longer any lovers, we have only unworthy suborners.

"It is licentiousness which has closed all hearts to us. They have begun by being libertines; how much it is to be feared, that they will end by being villains. It was thus the decline of Rome commenced, and what caused it? Luxury; yes, there lies the source of all vices, there lies the origin of so many irregularities, there lies all that corrupts so many hearts formed for virtue; there, in fine, Sir, are the reasons which have sufficed to induce me to undertake a step which I should never have executed without the assistance of

* Here again Mademoiselle Ninon plunders the "Nouvelle Héloïse." Julie also, after having with the most marvellous readiness confessed her delirium to Saint-Preux, pretends that it is he who ought to undertake to supply virtue to her: "You will become," she says to him, "my safeguard, you will protect my person against my own heart." Pitiable sophism! which would tend to take away from the woman precisely the only advantage she has over the man, as long as she has not been corrupted by him, that is to say, the power of resisting the impulses of the senses. What would woman be, deprived of this prerogative of delicacy and modesty? A being in all respects weaker than man, and as such condemned to serve for his plaything.

others. Now condemn me: I shall not be the less submissive to whatever you may decide."

Whether the somewhat wordy dissertation of this little philosopher in petticoats, made Beaumarchais think that it would be too difficult a task to bring such an excitable girl to reason, or whether the labours which were pressing upon him on all sides prevented him from following up this strange correspondence, it is at all events certain that he ceased to reply to the long letters of Mademoiselle Ninon. She then addressed to him the most grievous reproaches; but what was to be done? War had just broken out between France and England, Beaumarchais, who had contributed his share towards bringing about this result, was fully engaged in the conflict; he was preparing political Memorials, and fitting out vessels; where was he to find time for answering the confidential communications of Mademoiselle Ninon? It appears, however, that these letters had interested him, for he classified them himself in a packet, on which he has written in his own hand, "Letters from Ninon, or affair of my young client, who was unknown to me."

Mademoiselle Ninon, who was seventeen in 1778, is perhaps living now; she is ninety-five years of age; she goes out to warm herself a little in the sun, on the Cours at Aix, bent double and leaning on a stick, she does not even remember that she once loved with

wild passion a young Lovelace, who was collector at the salt depôt, or if she does remember it, she says what Benjamin Constant said, when entering upon his old age: "Of what use is it now to live? What is life when we can no longer be loved?"

CHAPTER XX.

BEAUMARCHAIS AND THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE.—FRANCE AND ENGLAND IN 1775.—BEAUMARCHAIS AND WILKES.—MEMORIAL TO THE KING.—THE OPPOSITION IN ENGLAND—BEAUMARCHAIS TO THE KING.—BEAUMARCHAIS SUPPORTED BY THE MINISTRY.—THE MINISTRY'S FIRST GRANT.

Among all the French writers who have spoken of Beaumarchais in connexion with one of the greatest events of modern times, the war of American Independence, I only know of one who has had even a vague idea of the share taken by the author of "The Barber of Seville" in that event. All the others content themselves with saying that he sent ammunition and arms secretly, to the insurgent colonies. In the edition of Beaumarchais' works, published in 1809, by Gudin, almost all the documents relating to this portion of his life have been voluntarily suppressed. The heirs of the author of "The Barber of Seville" were then carrying on with the United States, a law-suit which was not finally settled until 1835. In face of the arguments which were made use of for not paying the debt contracted with Beaumarchais, it would have

been imprudent to publish these documents; by raising the position of the negotiator, and exhibiting him no longer as a mere speculator, but also as a promoter and agent of the French policy, there was at the same time a risk of their giving some appearance of justice to the ill-founded objections of the United States' Government. Beaumarchais' influence, then, in the transactions which brought about the American war has remained almost unknown in France. On the other hand, various works have been published in the United States against Beaumarchais' claim, and consequently against himself, in which some facts are mixed up with a great many errors, and which prove that nations, like individuals, are not always distinguished by their gratitude. At present there is no harm in setting forth exactly, without exaggerating it, but at the same time without lessening it or changing its character, the part played by Beaumarchais, in one of the most important acts of Louis XVI.

The writer whom I pointed out above as having had some vague idea as to what this part was, is the Duke de Lévis, who in his "Souvenirs and Portraits," in treating of the rupture between England and France, in reference to the United States under the Maurepas Ministry in 1778, wrote the following lines; "A wise ministry would have profited by the embarrassed position of the English to increase our fleet without endangering it, and Louis XVI., whose disposition

was pacific, would easily have entered into these views. He would have waited with patience for the development of a large maritime force, capable of making his power respected in the two worlds. This prudent system was counteracted by the influence which Beaumarchais exercised on M. de Maurepas. *This man, more famous in literature than in politics, nevertheless had rather a large share in the war of Independence.*" Hitherto, if we except the question of opinion, which we will examine presently, the facts set forth by M. de Lévis are correct; but what follows is a gross error, a strange confusion of dates and circumstances. This is what the Duke de Lévis adds: "Beaumarchais had purchased at the lowest price, in Holland, an immense quantity of guns, not less than sixty thousand, and had sold them on credit to the agents of the Americans. If they succumbed, his claim became lost with their liberty. The skilful author of 'Figaro,' who had found access to M. de Maurepas, and who amused him by his sallies, succeeded in determining him to commence hostilities." It was scarcely worth while to have shown such correct information just before, in order to confound two things which have not the least connexion: the policy of France in the American question, which lasted from 1775 to 1778, and the purchase of sixty thousand guns by Beaumarchais in Holland, fourteen years later, in 1792, and which were purchased not for the United

States, who had then no longer any need for them, but for France, and which consequently had nothing to do with the American affair. Under the Maurepas Ministry, Beaumarchais had not to buy guns in Holland, for the excellent reason, that he took them from the government arsenals. Accordingly, the inferences which M. de Lévis draws from the purchase of the guns, fall to the ground with the fact itself.

The author of "Souvenirs et Portraits" is no less deceived when, in criticising M. de Maurepas' policy, which, according to him, was suggested by Beaumarchais, he says the following: "If M. de Maurepas had been more clever, he would have sent the Americans abundant and secret assistance, but he would never have come to a rupture, which the English themselves were anxious to avoid. In this manner he would have prolonged a ruinous war between the mother country and the colonies: while economising the resources of France, he would have exhausted those of her eternal rival." We shall prove on the contrary that the system of secret, if not abundant assistance, which M. de Lévis reproaches the French ministry with not having practised, was precisely the one which was adopted through the influence of Beaumarchais; that this system was maintained as long as it could be, but that a period soon arrived when to continue it became impossible, and when it became necessary to choose between a war against

England reconciled with America, or an alliance with America against England. From 1774 to 1778 the French policy on the question which occupies us, went through three distinct phases, which succeeded one another as a matter of necessity: First, absolute neutrality, in expectation of events; secondly, secret support; thirdly, open alliance. We shall see Beaumarchais exhausting himself in efforts to drag our policy from the first to the second phase, which was to produce the third, and we shall see him succeed in it; but if he succeeded, it was not alone, as M. de Lévis said, because he amused M. de Maurepas in his old age by his sallies; he brought something else to the question besides sallies. M. de Maurepas, in spite of his influence, did not in himself constitute the whole government; the department of foreign affairs was at that time intrusted to a minister, M. de Vergennes, whom history, perhaps, does not appreciate at his full value, because he did not occupy himself in getting his praises celebrated, but who was none the less for that, one of the most enlightened, wise, and firm ministers France ever had. M. de Vergennes was not a man to let himself be taken by sallies.

To consider another point, Louis XVI., the most upright of kings, was strongly averse to making use of the underhand schemes which are sanctioned in politics, even towards a rival power which, to gain an advantageous end, did not always trouble itself about

the morality of the means. For such a king and such a minister to determine on intrusting Beaumarchais with the dangerous and delicate operation, of which we have to give an account, it was necessary, on the one hand, that the exigencies of the situation should be in accordance with his arguments, and, on the other hand, that both should have some confidence, not only in the wit, but in the capacity, sagacity, and prudence of the person who received such a mission from them.

What was the position of France in relation to England, at the period when the quarrel between the American colonies and the mother country broke out? Its situation was deplorable; the disastrous seven years' war had benefited England alone. During these seven years' hostilities more than nine hundred thousand men had perished by land and sea, without reckoning the victims of the ravages and miseries which war brings in its train—and at the termination of this long struggle, no alteration was made in the limits of the continental powers. England alone had gained at our expense in her colonies and commerce. By the fatal treaty of 1763, we had to give up to her Canada, the Isle of Cape Breton, the Islands of Grenada, St. Vincent, Dominica, and Tobago, besides Senegal; our Indian possessions were ruined, and to complete the insult, England had forced us to raze the fortifications of Dunkirk, and to

submit for ever to the presence of an English commissioner, without whose authorisation it was not permitted to move a single paving-stone on the quays or harbour of a French city. This last article of the treaty of 1763 had remained on the heart of France as a bitter insult; and it is pleasing to see, in an unpublished despatch from M. de Vergennes to M. de Guines, a lively feeling of the shock inflicted on the national pride by this odious stipulation. We can perceive in it a noble desire to efface this shame, which was indeed effaced by the American war.

"You know," writes the minister to his ambassador, in July 1775, "the jealous sensitiveness with which this article, so humiliating to France, is regarded, and the abuse to which the English ministers have only too often turned it for our mortification." The tone of English diplomacy was indeed that of the conqueror's; it was harsh, readily arrogant, and bore the vindictive stamp of the policy of Lord Chatham.

It was impossible, in such a situation, for France and its government, not to look with a certain interest upon the quarrel which had long been entered into between the colonies and England upon the question of taxation, as it gradually became more bitter, and assumed a graver and graver aspect. The rigorous measures adopted in 1774 by the English ministry against the town of Boston, made America pass from opposition to contest; but it still seemed

scarcely possible that the movement could not be repressed, and that inexperienced and unarmed militia would make head against the English troops. If the opposition in England made use of this rebellion, and exaggerated its importance, in order to attack the ministry of Lord North, it did not itself believe the danger was serious. As for the ministerial party, it saw nothing in it but an insignificant disturbance. The French government thought then, first of all, like every one, that the quarrel would end by being promptly suppressed, and followed by some concessions. However, it was necessary for it to be well informed as to the progress and effect of events, and it could only acquire this information at London. The French ambassador at London was then the Count, afterwards the Duke de Guines, a man of wit and pleasure, but of very ordinary capacity, whose information, derived as it was from the English ministers, and accepted without being verified, inspired but little confidence. Hence it was necessary for the French government to have recourse to every source of information, and to send various agents to London. Beaumarchais, as was his custom, put himself forward; he had given satisfaction by the skill with which he had treated the affair of d'Eon's papers, which had been standing over several years. This affair, not being yet completely terminated, presented a natural pretext for sending him to London, where he

had the advantage of being intimate at the same time with the most opposite parties. It will be remembered that ten years previously, in the course of his residence in Spain, he had been the favourite of Lord Rochford, who was then ambassador at Madrid, and a great musical amateur: Beaumarchais used to sing duets with him, and had always kept up his intimacy with him as much as possible. Now in 1775, Lord Rochford happened to be minister of foreign affairs in Lord North's cabinet, and Lord Rochford was not a model of discretion, to judge by the following lines, which I extract from a despatch, wherein M. de Vergennes characterises, the English minister, with his prudent and calm manner: "If," he writes, "the idea we have formed of Lord Rochford is correct, it cannot be difficult to make him say more than he intends." Beaumarchais, in fact, knew very easily how to make Lord Rochford speak out. It is true that this minister was replaced at the end of 1775, but he always remained a very influential man, living on terms of intimacy with George III., and consequently well worth listening to.

Beaumarchais was not less intimate with the democrat, or rather the demagogue, Wilkes, a personage who was not very worthy of the influence he exercised for several years; but who at this time, as mayor of London, was moving and directing the masses at will. Wilkes had ardently embraced the cause of the colo-

nies, which he made the subject of vigorous attacks against Lord North's cabinet. At his house Beaumarchais met all the Americans who came to England to take the part of the insurgents, or to observe the progress of affairs. At the epoch at which we have arrived (1775), the colonies had not yet completely broken with the mother country; but the first congress that was held at Philadelphia, while repelling the notion of a separation, had nevertheless held it out in perspective as a threat, in case England should not do justice to the lawful complaints of the colonies. The ministry had replied to the Americans by sending troops, and adopting rigorous measures. A royal proclamation declared them guilty of rebellion. A bill was brought in, by which it was ordered that they should be treated as enemies, and all their ships chased. These acts produced the most lively discussions. Wilkes called for the heads of ministers, who were crushed beneath the weight of Lord Chatham's eloquence. The situation was critical in the highest degree, and nevertheless very few persons, either in England or France, thought that a separation was imminent. The ministerial orators insisted on the necessity of finishing with a handful of disaffected persons; the orators of the opposition called on the ministers for an account of the English blood which had been shed by English hands, and suggested plans of conciliation; but the possibility of a complete rup-

ture was rejected by all. At this moment, in September 1775, Beaumarchais addressed a long unpublished Memorial, of which I must reproduce the greater part. It will be remarked with what sagacity, nearly a year before the declaration of independence, at a period when the triumph of the Americans still appeared a chimera, he puts their triumph forward as a certainty, of which it is impossible to doubt, and the sure prospect of which should be used as a basis for the policy of France. The following is the Memorial:

TO THE KING. *

"Sire,—With the firm confidence I entertain that the extracts I address to your Majesty are for you alone, and will not go out of your hands, I will continue, Sire, to present to you the truth on all points known to me, which appear to me to be of value to your service, without regard to the interests of any one in the world.

"I withdrew from England under pretext of going to the country, and have come in all haste from London to Paris, in order to confer with Messieurs de Vergennes and Sartines, on matters which are too important and too delicate to be intrusted to the fidelity of any courier.

"Sire, England is in such a crisis, such a state of disorder within and without, that it would be almost on the point of ruin, if her neighbours and rivals were themselves in a state to occupy themselves seriously about her. I will set forth faithfully the position of the English in America; I received the particulars from an inhabitant of Philadelphia, who had lately arrived from the colonies, and had just been present at

* Given to the king, sealed, by M. de Sartines, Sept. 21, 1775.

a conference with the English ministers, who were thrown into the greatest trouble, and struck with terror by his recital. The Americans, determined to suffer everything rather than give way, and, full of that enthusiasm for liberty which has so often rendered the little nation of Corsica redoubtable to the Genoese, have thirty-eight thousand effective men, armed and resolute, beneath the walls of Boston; they have reduced the English army to the necessity of dying of hunger in this town, or of seeking for winter quarters elsewhere, which it will do forthwith. About forty thousand men, well armed, and as determined as the former, defend the rest of the country, without these eighty thousand men having taken away a single labourer from the ground, a single workman from the manufactories. All those persons who were engaged in the fisheries, which the English have destroyed, have become soldiers, and feel that they have to avenge the ruin of their families and the liberty of their country; all those persons who took part in maritime commerce, which the English have brought to an end, have joined the fishermen to make war on their common persecutors; all the persons who worked in the harbours have increased this army of furious men, whose actions are all animated by a spirit of vengeance and hatred.

"I say, Sire, that such a nation must be invincible, above all, when it has at its back as much country as it can possibly require for retreating, even if the English could make themselves masters of all their seaboard, which they are far from having done. All sensible persons then are convinced, in England, that the English colonies are lost to the mother country, and that is also my opinion.*

* The debates of the English Parliament, at this date, in September 1775, prove, on the contrary, that the opinion which Beaumarchais brings forward as that of all sensible persons in England, was then only shared by very few. He speaks thus in order to give more weight to his opinion, and thus takes away from this opinion a proof of sagacity which we must restore to it.

"The open war which is taking place in America is less fatal to England than the intestine war which must yet break out in London; the bitterness between parties has been carried to the greatest excess since the proclamation of the King of England, which declares the Americans to be rebels. This absurdity, this masterpiece of madness, on the part of the Government, has renewed the strength of all the men of the opposition, who have united against it; a resolution has been taken to come to an open collision with the court party during the first sittings of the Parliament. It is thought that these sittings will not pass without seven or eight members of the opposition being sent to the Tower of London, and that is just the appointed time for sounding the tocsin. Lord Rochford, who has been my friend for the last fifteen years, in conversing with me, said these words, with a sigh: '*I am much afraid, Sir, that the winter will not pass without some heads being brought down, either among the king's party or the opposition.*' On the other side, the Lord Mayor Wilkes, in a moment of joy and liberty, at the end of a splendid dinner, said to me publicly, the following words: 'The King of England has long done me the honour of hating me. For my part, I have always rendered him the justice of despising him. The time has come for deciding which of us has formed the best opinion of the other, and on which side the wind will cause heads to fall.'*

"Lord North, who is threatened with all this, would willingly give in his resignation, if he could do so with honour and safety.

" . . The least check which the royal army receives in America, by increasing the audacity of the people and the opposition, may decide the affair at London, at a moment

* This speech of Wilkes is the more insolent, from the fact that it proceeds from a man who was wanting both in private and political morality.

when it is least expected, and if the king finds himself forced to yield, I say it with a shudder, I do not think his crown more secure on his head, than the heads of his ministers upon their shoulders. This unhappy English nation, with its frantic liberty, may inspire the man who reflects with true compassion. It has never tasted the sweetness of living peaceably under a good and virtuous king. They despise us, and treat us as slaves, because we obey voluntarily; but if the reign of a weak or bad prince has sometimes caused a momentary evil to France, the licentious rage, which the English call liberty, has never left an instant of happiness and true repose to this indomitable nation. King and subjects are all equally unhappy.* Now, to increase the trouble still more, a secret subscription has been opened in London at the houses of two of the richest merchants of the capital, where all the disaffected send their gold to be forwarded to the Americans, or to pay for the assistance which is supplied to them by the Dutch. They do more, they have secret connexions in Portugal, even in the king's council, on which they spend a great deal of money by way of trying to prevent the Portuguese from coming to any arrangement with the Spaniards.† They are in hope that this war will soon draw the English and French into the quarrel of the Allies, and that this new incident will with more certainty produce the destruction of the present ministry, which is the constant object of all the opposition.

"Résumé:—America escapes the English in spite of their

* Here are political opinions which one is not accustomed to attribute to the author of "The Marriage of Figaro." It is true that Beaumarchais wrote this to a king, of whom he was the agent; but, in general, an examination of his papers proves that, in application, his political ideas were but little in accordance with the effervescence of his wit.

† There was at this time a dispute between Portugal and Spain upon a boundary question.

efforts; war is kindled with more strength in London than at Boston. The end of this crisis will bring about war with the French, if the opposition triumphs, whether Chatham or Rockingham replace Lord North. The opposition, to increase the trouble, intrigue in Portugal to prevent the settlement with Spain.

"Our ministry, which is badly informed, appears stagnant and passive over all these events, which affect us most nearly.

"It is indispensable to have a superior and vigilant man in London, at present.

"The first thing, which it is impossible to avoid doing, is to urge the Spanish ministry to be less difficult with regard to its claims against Portugal. While the English ministry is endeavouring to bring Portugal to a reconciliation, and is informing the Portuguese that the internal troubles of England would absolutely prevent her at present from assisting them, according to the terms of the last treaty, it is indispensable that we should take our steps with the Spanish ministry, in order to destroy, as much as possible, the effect of the intrigues and money of the English opposition, which is using its last efforts in Portugal in order seriously to produce a quarrel between the two powers of the South. . . .

" . . . Such, Sire, are the motives of my secret journey to France. Whatever use your Majesty may make of this paper, I rely enough on the virtue and kindness of my master to hope that he will not turn these proofs of my zeal against myself, by intrusting them to any one, and thus increasing the number of my enemies, who will never stop me as long as I remain certain of the secrecy and protection of your Majesty.

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

It is seen that in this Memorial Beaumarchais announces, with rare perspicacity, the approaching

triumph of the American colonies, but it is also seen that he lays stress on the necessity of keeping away from everything which might drag France into a conflict, the moment of which has not yet arrived. If Beaumarchais exaggerates the consequences of the struggle of parties in England, the fact is, that every one else was also deceived. It was naturally supposed that the checks experienced in America would render England furious with her ministers; * but the English people, with that sentiment of nationality, and that good sense which often characterise it in great crises, rendered these prognostications untrue. The defeat of the English troops weakened the opposition still more than the ministry: everything was made subservient to the necessity of fighting with energy, and the general irritation, instead of being increased, became considerably allayed. It ought also to be observed, that Beaumarchais' Memorial to the king is stated to have been, first of all, given to M. de Sartines, which authorises us to suppose that Beaumarchais concealed this step from M. de Vergennes, or did not find this minister possessed the amount of confidence which was requisite. This, perhaps, will explain the

* We have read a despatch of M. de Vergennes, written at about the same date as the memorial cited above, in which this minister appears, like Beaumarchais, swayed by the idea that a victory of the insurgents in America must cause a revolution to break out in London. M. de Vergennes goes so far as to express fears for the very person of the English king.

following letter to M. de Vergennes, written the day after the Memorial:

"M. le Comte,—When zeal is indiscreet, it ought to be repressed; when it is welcome, it should be encouraged; but all the sagacity in the world would be unable to make a person, to whom no reply is given, imagine what conduct he is to pursue.

"I yesterday communicated to the king, through M. de Sartines, a short paper, which is only the résumé of what I stated to you at the long conference you granted to me the evening before: it gives the exact state of men and things in England; it concludes with the proposition I had made to you of putting a gag, during the time necessary for our warlike preparations, on everything which, either by shouts or silence, could hasten or retard the proper moment. All this ought to have been discussed at the council, and this morning I hear nothing from you about it. The most fatal things to all affairs are uncertainty and loss of time.

"Must I wait for your answer, or am I to start without having one? Did I do well or ill in sounding minds whose dispositions are becoming so important to us? Shall I for the future take no advantage of confidential communications, and shall I repel, instead of welcoming the overtures which must have an influence on the final determination? Finally, am I a useful agent to my country, or only a deaf and dumb traveller? . . I shall wait for your answer to this letter, to start.

"I am, &c.,

"BEAUMARCHAIS.

"Paris, September 22nd, 1775."

He received, without doubt, the answer he desired,

for the next day, before going back to London, he wrote to M. de Vergennes:

"Paris, September 23, 1775.

"M. le Comte,—I start, well informed of the king's intentions and your own; let your Excellency be at ease: it would be an unpardonable stupidity on my part, in such an affair, to compromise in any way the dignity of the sovereign and his minister; to do the best one can, is nothing in politics, the first blunderer can offer as much; to do the best that circumstances admit of, is what ought to distinguish from the common body of his servants, him whom his Majesty and yourself, M. le Comte, honour with your confidence on so delicate a point.

"I am, &c.,

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

Dating from this moment, a direct correspondence was established between Beaumarchais and M. de Vergennes, and the argument which he pursues incessantly under various forms is the following: "The Americans will triumph, but they must be assisted in their struggle, for if they succumbed, they would join the English, and would turn round against us. We are not yet in a fit state for making war; we must prepare ourselves, keep up the struggle, and with that view send secret assistance in a prudent manner to the Americans." The following Memorial, addressed to Louis XVI. through the medium of M. de Vergennes, is the development of this idea, and when compared with the first, shows us what progress the question had made:

PEACE OR WAR.

TO THE KING ALONE. *

"Sire,—The famous quarrel between America and England, which will soon divide the world and change the system of Europe, imposes upon each power the necessity of examining well, in what manner the event of this separation can influence it, and either serve it or injure it.

"But the most interested of all countries is certainly France, whose sugar islands have, since the last peace, been the constant object of the regrets and hopes of the English; regrets and hopes which must infallibly bring us war, unless by a weakness impossible to suppose, we consent to sacrifice our rich possessions of the gulf to the chimera of a shameful peace, which would be more injurious even than the war which we dread.' In a first Memorial, sent three months since to your Majesty, by M. de Vergennes, I endeavoured to establish soundly that your Majesty's character for justice could not be injured by taking wise precautions against enemies who are never delicate about those they take against us.

"At present, when a violent crisis is approaching with great rapidity, I am obliged to warn your Majesty that the preservation of our possessions in America, and the peace which your Majesty appears to desire so much, depend solely upon this one proposition: *the Americans must be assisted.* I will now demonstrate it.

"The King of England, the ministers of the Parliament, the opposition, the nation, the English people, all the parties, in fine, who are tearing this state asunder, agree that they ought no longer to hope to regain the Americans, and that not even the great efforts which are being now made to subject them, can ever reduce them with success. Thence, Sire, these violent debates between the ministry and the opposition,

* Given to M. de Vergennes, unclosed, February 29, 1776.

this flux and reflux of opinions admitted or rejected, which, as they do not advance matters, only serve to put the question in a plainer and a clearer light.

"Lord North, afraid of acting alone as pilot, in the height of such a storm, has just profited by the ambition of Lord Germaine, to lay all the weight of affairs on his ambitious head.

"Lord Germaine, confused by the clamour, and struck by the terrible arguments of the opposition, says now to Lords Shelburne and Rockingham, the leaders of the party: 'In the state in which things are, gentlemen, will you venture to answer to the nation, for the Americans submitting to the Navigation Act, and returning under the yoke, *on the sole condition*, contained in the plan of Lord Shelburne, of being replaced in the position in which they stood before the troubles of 1763? If so, gentlemen, take possession of the ministry, and make yourselves responsible with the safety of the state at your risks, perils, and fortunes.'

"The opposition, disposed to take the minister at his word, and quite ready to say yes, is only stopped by a doubt, lest the Americans, encouraged by their successes, and, perhaps, emboldened by some secret treaties with Spain and France, may refuse now, those very conditions of peace, which they asked for with clasped hands, two years since.

"On the other hand, M. L.* (M. de Vergennes will tell your Majesty his name), a secret deputy from the colonies to London, quite discouraged by the inability of the efforts he has made, through me, with the French ministry, to obtain assistance in the shape of powder and munitions of war, says to me now: 'For the last time, is France absolutely decided to refuse to us all assistance, and to become the victim of England and the fable of Europe through this incredible

* It was Arthur Lee, who afterwards formed part, with Franklin, of the American deputation to Paris, and of whom we shall speak again directly.

apathy? Obliged to give a positive answer, I wait for your reply in order to give my own. We offer France, in return for her assistance, a secret treaty of commerce, which will transfer to her, for a certain number of years after the peace, all the advantages by which we have, for more than a century, enriched England, besides guaranteeing her possessions according to the forces at our disposal. Do you not accept this? I only ask from Lord Shelburne the time a vessel would take to go and return, to inform the Congress of the propositions of England, and I can tell you at present what resolutions the Congress will take on the subject. They will immediately make a public proclamation, by which they will offer to all the nations in the world, in order to obtain their assistance, the conditions I now offer to you in secret. And in order to take vengeance on France, and force her publicly to make a declaration with respect to them, if we commit her beyond recall, they will send into your ports the first prizes they take from the English: then on whatever side you may turn, this war, which you avoid and fear so much, becomes inevitable, for either you will receive our prizes in your ports, or you will send them back; if you receive them, the rupture with England is certain; if you send them back, instantly the Congress accepts peace on the conditions imposed by the mother country; the Americans, in indignation unite all their forces to those of England to fall on your islands, and prove to you, that the fine precautions you had taken for preserving your possessions, were just those which were to deprive you of them for ever.

"Go, Sire, go to France, set before them this picture of affairs; I will shut myself up in the country, until your return, so as not to be forced to give an answer before receiving yours. Tell your ministers that I am ready to follow you there, if necessary, in order to confirm these declarations; tell them *that I hear the Congress has sent two deputies to the court of Madrid with the same object, and I may add*

that they have received a very satisfactory answer. Could the French council possess now the glorious prerogative of being the only one to be blinded as to the glory of the king and the interests of his kingdom.'

"Such, Sire, is the terrible and striking picture of our position. Your Majesty wishes sincerely for peace. The résumé of this Memorial will furnish you, Sire, with the means of preserving it.

"Let us submit all possible hypotheses, and let us reason.

"What follows is very important.

"Either England will have the most complete success in America during the campaign;

"Or the Americans will repel the English with loss.

"Either England will come to the determination already adopted by the king, of abandoning the colonies to themselves, or parting from them in a friendly manner;

"Or the opposition, in taking possession of the Government, will answer for the submission of the colonies on condition of their being restored to the position they were in, in 1763.

"Here are all the possibilities collected together. Is there a single one of them which does not instantly give you the war you you wish to avoid? Sire, in the name of God, deign to examine the matter with me.

"First, if England triumphs over America, she can only do so by an enormous expenditure of men and money. Now the only compensation the English propose to themselves for so many losses, is to take possession on their return of the French islands, and thus make themselves the exclusive vendors of the valuable supply of sugar, which can alone repair all the injuries done to their commerce, and this capture would also render them for ever the absolute possessors of the advantages derived from the contraband commerce carried on by the continent with these islands.

"Then, Sire, there would remain to you nothing but the option of commencing at a later period an unprofitable war,

or of sacrificing to the most shameful of inactive peaces, all your American colonies, and of losing 280 millions of capital, and more than 30 millions of revenue.

"2. If the Americans are victorious, they instantly become free, and the English, in despair at seeing their existence diminished by three quarters, will only be the more anxious, the more eager; to seek a compensation, which will have become indispensable, in the easy capture of our American possessions, and we may be certain that they will not fail to do so.

"3. If the English consider themselves forced to abandon the colonies to themselves without striking a blow, as it is the secret wish of the king they should do, the loss being the same for their existence, and their commerce being equally ruined, the result for us would be similar to the preceding one; except that the English, less weakened by this amicable surrender, than by a bloody and ruinous campaign, would only derive from it more means and facilities for gaining possession of our islands, which they would then be unable to do without, if they wished to preserve their own, and to keep any footing in America.

"4. If the opposition takes possession of the Government, and concludes a treaty of re-union with the colonies, the Americans, indignant with France, whose refusal will alone have caused them to submit to the mother country, threaten us from the present moment to unite all their forces with England, in order to take possession of our islands. They will, indeed, only re-unite with the mother country on this condition, and Heaven knows with what joy the ministry, composed of Lords Chatham, Shelburne, and Rockingham, whose dispositions towards us are publicly known, would adopt the resentment of the Americans, and carry on against you without cessation the most obstinate and cruel war.

"What, then, is to be done in this extremity, so as to have peace and preserve our islands?

"You will only preserve the peace you desire, Sire, by preventing it at all price from being made between England and America, and in preventing one from completely triumphing over the other; and the only means of attaining this end is by giving assistance to the Americans, who will put their forces on an equality with those of England, but nothing beyond. And believe me, Sire, that the economy of a few millions at present may, before long, cost a great deal of blood and money to France.

"Believe me above all, Sire, that the necessary preparations for the first campaign will alone cost you more than all the assistance you are asked for now; and that the wretched economy of two or three millions will certainly make you lose, before two years, more than three hundred.

"If it be replied that we cannot assist the Americans without wounding England, and without drawing upon us the storm which I wish to keep off, I reply in my turn, that this danger will not be incurred, if the plan I have so many times proposed be followed, that of secretly assisting the Americans without compromising ourselves; imposing upon them, as a first condition, that they shall never send any prizes into our ports, and never commit any act which shall tend to divulge the secret of the assistance, which, the first indiscretion on the part of congress, would cause it instantly to lose. And if your Majesty has not at hand a more clever man to employ in the matter, I undertake and answer for the execution of the treaty, without any one being compromised, persuaded that my zeal will supply my want of talent, better than the talent of another could replace my zeal.

"Your Majesty can see, without trouble, that the whole success of this matter depends on secrecy and celerity; and one thing infinitely important to both, would be to send Lord Stormont back, if possible, to London, as, through his extended connexions in France, he is in a position to instruct, and does daily instruct England of all that is said and discussed in the council of your Majesty.

"This is very extraordinary, but this is the case; the occasion of the recall of M. de Guines, is as favourable as possible.

"England desires positively to have an ambassador; if your Majesty were in no haste to name a successor to M. de Guines, and sent to England a chargé d'affaires or minister of acknowledged capacity,* Lord Stormont would be instantly recalled; and whatever minister they might name in place of this ambassador, much time would elapse before he could be in a position, through his connexions, to do us as much harm as we receive from Lord Stormont, and the crisis once passed, the most frivolous or the most magnificent of our nobles, might be sent without risk, as ambassador to London; after the plan had been carried out, or had failed, all the rest would be without importance. Your Majesty can judge by these papers, whether my zeal is not as enlightened as it is ardent and pure; but if my august master, forgetting all the dangers which a word escaping from his mouth might cause to a good servant, who knows and serves but him alone, should allow it to appear that it is from me he receives this secret information, then even the exercise of all his authority would with difficulty preserve me from ruin, so much power have cabals and intrigues, Sire, in the midst of your court to injure and upset the most important enterprises. Your Majesty knows better than any one, that secrecy is the soul of business; and that in politics, a plan discovered is only a plan lost. Since I have served you, Sire, I have never asked you, nor ever will ask you, for anything. Only, my sovereign master, provide that I be not hindered from working in your service, and all my existence is consecrated to you.

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

* The advice of Beaumarchais was followed. After the recall of M. de Guines, a simple chargé d'affaires, M. Garnier, was in the first instance sent to England.

It is seen from the above, that Beaumarchais considers the moment to have arrived for supporting strongly the plan of secret assistance; and that he sets forth this plan with a skill which would do honour to a professed diplomatist; it is seen also that he proposes himself, for the first time, as ready to put it into execution. The prudence of M. de Vergennes still led to a refusal. Beaumarchais wrote him a dozen letters of a more and more pressing character, which appeared to make a sufficiently lively impression on his mind. M. de Vergennes no longer believed so much in the possibility of preserving peace: "Although the tendency of France and Spain," he writes to our chargé d'affaires, at London, April 20, 1776, "is towards insuring the duration of peace, I confess to you that I am not at my ease when I consider the number of accidents, independent of the will of the sovereigns, which may confound their foresight." The disquietude of the French minister was soon increased by the distrustful and vexatious attitude of the English government; although France at the moment was still preserving the most absolute neutrality, that was not sufficient for the cabinet of London: it claimed to search our ships, to pursue the American vessels even beneath the guns of our forts, it interfered with our commerce, it maintained that we ought to punish those of our merchants who trafficked with the rebels. Beaumar-

chais carefully took advantage of these circumstances to support his idea. He narrated to M. de Vergennes, with much vivacity, a scene which he had had with Lord Rochford on this claim of the English government to have our merchants punished, and M. de Vergennes replied to him in the following letter, in which the habitual calmness of the minister appears to undergo a slight change, from contact with the feverish impetuosity of Beaumarchais:

"Versailles, April 26, 1776.

"I have laid before the king's eyes, Sir, the letter you did me the honour to write to me, Tuesday the 16th, and not the 12th of this month. I have the satisfaction of announcing to you that his Majesty much approved of the noble and frank manner in which you repelled the attack made upon you by Lord Rochford, on the subject of the American vessel, destined it is said for Nantes, and taken to Bristol. You said nothing which his Majesty would not have ordered you to say, if he could have foreseen that you would be called upon to give an explanation on a point so foreign to the duties with which you are charged.* According to Lord Rochford's tone, he would seem to base his arguments on an agreement binding us to make England's interest our own. I am not acquainted with this agreement; it does not exist in the example which England gave us when she thought she could injure us. Let it only be remembered what her conduct was with regard to us during the troubles of Corsica. I do not cite this example by way of authorising us to follow it. A king faithful to his principles of justice, does not seek to take ad-

* The ostensible mission of Beaumarchais was at this moment to collect Spanish piastres at London for the service of our colonies.

vantage of the situation of the English, in order to increase their embarrassment; but he cannot take away from his subjects the protection he owes to their commerce . . . . . It would be contrary to all reason and propriety to pretend that we ought not to sell any article of commerce to any person, because it would be possible it might pass, at second hand, into America."

After divers details, the minister terminates thus:—

"Receive all my compliments, Sir. After having assured you of the king's approbation, mine ought not to appear to you very interesting; however, I cannot help applauding the wisdom and firmness of your conduct, and of renewing to you the expression of my esteem.

"I am very perfectly, Sir, &c.

"De Vergennes."

It is evident that the minister is beginning to grow fatigued with the exigences of the English Cabinet, and that Beaumarchais and his plan of secret assistance are making some progress in his opinion. Beaumarchais had not yet thought of realizing this plan in the form of a commercial operation, undertaken by him with the assistance of government, but at his own risk. He asked for three millions to transmit directly, either in money or in munitions, to the agents of America.

The French ministry decided at last to accept the proposed arrangement and to cause it to be accepted by the king; however, the prudence of M. de Vergennes rejected it in the form suggested, which appeared

of too compromising a character. Beaumarchais was told, "that the operation must essentially, in the eyes of the English government, and even in the eyes of the Americans, have the appearance of an individual speculation, to which the French ministers are strangers. That it may be so in appearance, it must also be so to a certain point, in reality. We will give a million secretly, we will try to induce the court of Spain to unite with us in this affair, and supply you on its side with an equal sum; with these two millions and the co-operation of individuals who will be willing to take part in your enterprise, you will be able to found a large house of commerce, and at your own risk can supply America with arms, ammunition, articles of equipment, and all other articles necessary for keeping up the war. Our arsenals will give you arms and ammunition, but you shall replace them, or shall pay for them. You shall ask for no money from the Americans, as they have none; but you shall ask them for returns in products of their soil, and we help you to get rid of them in this country, while you shall grant them, on your side, every facility possible. In a word, the operation after being secretly supported by us at the commencement, must afterwards feed and support itself; but, on the other side, as we reserve to ourselves the right of favouring or discouraging it, according to the requirements of our policy, you shall

render us an account of your profits and your losses, and we will judge whether we are to accord you fresh assistance, or give you an acquittal for the sums previously granted."

Such, as we show further on, was the true physiognomy of this operation, which was at once political and commercial. It certainly presented advantages for Beaumarchais, but it also offered many dangers; for in addition to this first investment of two millions, it was necessary to collect money from private speculators, to risk it in a very hazardous affair, which might swallow up everything, and swallow up at the same time the personal fortune of the minister's agent. Beaumarchais, in fact, once engaged in so vast an enterprise (his first cargo alone came to more than three millions), had to put the following questions to himself: What will become of my operation if my vessels are taken by the English cruisers? What will become of it if the government, frightened by the threats of the English diplomatists, not only abandon but sacrifice me? What will become of it, finally, if the Americans are conquered, or if, after receiving my cargoes, they consider themselves at liberty to send nothing in return? Such prospects might have made another man hesitate; but the reader already knows that the author of "The Barber of Seville" was not afraid of difficulties. He threw himself into this one with his ordi-

nary intrepidity, and on the 10th June, 1776, a month before the United States published their declaration of independence, he signed that famous receipt which, kept secret under the monarchy, and given to the United States in 1794, under the republic, occasioned a law-suit of fifty years' duration, to which we shall return. It is conceived in the following terms:

"I have received from M. Duvergier, conformably to the orders of the Count de Vergennes, dated the 5th instant, which I have remitted to him, the sum of one million, of which I will render account to the said Count de Vergennes.

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

"Received One million livres, Tournois.

Paris, June 10, 1776."

Two months afterwards the Court of Spain decided to contribute the sum of a million to the operation directed by Beaumarchais. But in order that this subvention might be kept secret, the Spanish million, before reaching the hands of the author of "The Barber of Seville," had to make a little circuit. The Spanish ambassador paid it into the public treasury of France, and took an acknowledgment for it from the cashier; he remitted this acknowledgment to M. de Vergennes, and the latter gave it to Beaumarchais in exchange for the following receipt, which I quote literally, from the original in the Archives of Foreign Affairs:

"I have received from his Excellency M. le Comte de Vergennes, an acknowledgment for the million livres Tournois, which M. Duvergier had given to the Spanish ambassador, with which acknowledgment I shall touch, at the royal treasury, the said sum of a million Tournois, for the employment of which I will render an account to his said Excellency M. le Comte de Vergennes.

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

"At Versailles, Aug. 11, 1776."

Beginning at this day, the part of Beaumarchais in the American affair changes its nature. He passes from the position of an observer and instigator to that of an actor. He no longer merely writes Memorials: he sends off cargoes, combats against the winds, the waves, the English, and the hesitations of the ministry; and when by the very effect of his operations, war breaks out at length between France and England, he figures brilliantly in it, with his *navy*. But in order to understand the unexpected difficulties with which he is obliged to meet in his relations with the Congress of the United States, we must first of all retrace our steps for a moment, and say a word about an American who exercised a disastrous influence on this epoch of Beaumarchais' life.

CHAPTER XXI.

ARTHUR LEE.—CHANCES OF A WAR WITH ENGLAND.—DR. DUBOURG AND BEAUMARCHAIS' "YOUNG LADIES."—RODERIGUE HORTALEZ AND CO.—FRANKLIN AND THE AMERICAN DEPUTATION.—BEAUMARCHAIS' AGENT IN AMERICA.

It will be remembered that Beaumarchais, when eagerly endeavouring to prevail upon Louis XVI. to help the Americans secretly, did not, at first, think of undertaking the operation at his own risk and peril, without the assistance of the ministry. He only offered to transmit, himself, to the agents of America, (having assured himself of their discretion,) the aid which the French government was willing to give to the insurgents. He had communicated this, his first, idea to an American who was in London in 1775, and whom he had met at the house of Wilkes. This was a Virginian, named Arthur Lee, young, and then unknown, who was studying law in England when the American Revolution broke out, and who was afterwards a member of the deputation from the United States to Paris, and at a later period a

member of Congress. One of the most esteemed writers of America, the only one who, to my knowledge, has sketched the relations between Beaumarchais and Arthur Lee with accuracy, Mr. Jared Sparks, paints the character of the latter in the following manner: "He deserved," he says, "consideration for his natural and acquired talents. He was a good writer, and defended the cause of his country with ardour and perseverance, but his disposition was restless and violent. Jealous of his rivals, distrustful of every one, he entangled himself and all those connected with him in a succession of disputes and difficulties."* We must add to this portrait, that Arthur Lee was devoured by ambition, and always disposed to make much of himself at the expense of others. His correspondence with the secret committee of the Congress, at the time when he formed part of the American deputation in France with Silas Deane and Franklin, is but a series of bitter and often most insulting insinuations against his two colleagues. It was not his fault that Franklin especially, did not pass for a thief, and that America did not believe that it was Arthur Lee alone, who had decided the alliance between the United States and France. We have before our eyes a biography of Arthur Lee, in two volumes, the

* "Life of Benjamin Franklin," by Jared Sparks, p. 447.

author of which, who without doubt is related to the American negotiator, for he bears the same name,* seems to adopt this opinion with a good faith, which is doubtless entitled to much respect, although founded on very inaccurate information. Having had occasion to study closely the works of the American deputation at Paris, we can affirm that Arthur Lee's assistance was very insignificant, that he had no credit with the French government, which suspected him, either rightly or wrongly, of having secret connexions with the English government, and that he really played in connection with it the part of the fly, in the fable of "La Mouche du Coche." This perfectly explains his permanent irritation against his two colleagues.

Such was the man whom Beaumarchais met in London at the end of 1775, and whom he informed of his endeavours with Louis XVI. and his ministers to obtain secret assistance for the Americans. Charmed to find an opportunity of assuming importance, Arthur Lee wrote immediately to the secret committee of the Congress, that "in consequence of his *active endeavours with the Ambassador of France at London, M. de Vergennes had sent to him, Arthur Lee, a secret agent, to inform him* that the court of France could not think of making war against Eng-

* "Life of Arthur Lee," by Richard Henry Lee. Boston, 1829.

land, but was ready to send arms and ammunition to the value of five millions to Cap Français, to be forwarded to the United States." There was not a word of truth in this information. M. de Vergennes had sent no agent to Arthur Lee, to make him promises of this kind. Beaumarchais had seen him at the house of Wilkes, and had spoken to him of his plans, his hopes, and of the Memorials he was addressing to the French government.

Arthur Lee, to give himself importance in the eyes of Congress, had completely changed the nature of this conversation, and the proof that the invention came from him, and not from Beaumarchais is, that at the very moment when this latter was soliciting in vain, from this secret, aid from M. de Vergennes, joining to his entreaties those of Arthur Lee, who declared himself ready to come to Paris if the minister desired it. The strange exaggerations of the young American had naturally made a lively impression on the secret committee of the Congress. It was the first news of the kind which arrived in America; so, it was concluded that Arthur Lee was a very clever negotiator, and as, just before the receipt of this news, the committee had just sent a private agent, Silas Deane, to France, to request the very assistance which Arthur Lee assured them was already promised, it intended to make the latter a joint agent with the former.

In the meantime Beaumarchais continued his solicitations to M. de Vergennes, who not only had promised nothing, but always refused. The colonies' chances of triumph were still too uncertain to justify the risk of a war with England, a war which would necessarily result, if through any indiscretion of the Americans it was divulged that this assistance had been given them. How was this danger to be guarded against? We have seen that Beaumarchais proposed several means in his Memorials to the king. The surest seemed to be to change the appearance of the operation, by concealing from the insurgents themselves the source of the assistance they received, and instead of giving them aid gratuitously, to assist in secret several commercial houses,* which would thus be enabled to send them stores, allowing them to be paid for in kind, and at the same time supporting all the losses the English cruisers might inflict on this prohibited description of commerce. Who cannot understand, indeed, that from the day when the cabinet of Versailles, following the example given it by England, both in the war with Corsica

* A letter from M. de Vergennes to Louis XVI., a letter from Louis XVI. to the King of Spain, published in M. de Flassan's "Histoire de la Diplomatie Française," and some other documents found among Beaumarchais' papers, induce me to think that different merchants did in fact receive subventions like Beaumarchais, and for the same end.

and in our civil wars of the sixteenth century, decided to assist the insurgents in this indirect mode, in order to avoid war, it was natural for it not only to allow, but to desire that the assistance should not be furnished gratuitously. Such gratuitous assistance would have manifestly revealed this co-operation to England.

When Beaumarchais returned from London to Paris, he kept up a correspondence with Arthur Lee in cyphers. When it had been agreed between M. de Vergennes and himself that the affair should bear a strictly private and commercial character, and that the participation of government should be carefully concealed from the Americans themselves, Beaumarchais, in conformance with ministerial instructions, wrote the following note to Arthur Lee, in London, June 12, 1776:

"The difficulties I have met with in my negotiations with the ministry, have made me decide to *form a company*, which will send the ammunition and powder to *your friend* as soon as possible, in consideration of tobacco being sent in return to the French cape."

Upon this, Silas Deane, the American agent, sent direct to France by the Congress, arrived. As he alone was furnished by the Congress with power to treat in their name, Beaumarchais made his agreements with him, and did not write again to Arthur Lee. The latter had relied upon this affair to make

himself popular in America. "He hoped," says the author of the "Life of Franklin," "to play the principal part in the enterprise. On hearing that it was passing into the hands of Mr. Deane, he hurried to Paris, accused Deane of interfering in his affairs, tried to cause a quarrel between him and Beaumarchais, and, not being able to succeed, returned to London, vexed at his failure and furious with Deane."* To this very exact account of Mr. Jared Sparks' we must add, that he was not less furious with Beaumarchais than with Deane. In order to avenge himself on both, he wrote without their knowledge to the secret committee of the Congress, that the two had agreed to deceive both the French Government and the United States, by changing what the ministry meant to be a gratuitous gift, into a commercial transaction. It was this insidious story of Arthur Lee's which caused all the trouble between Beaumarchais and the Congress. We shall soon see M. de Vergennes himself speaking very pointedly on the subject; but as his official answer, at the time when it was addressed to the Congress, might be looked upon as dictated by political expediency, we ought, in exhibiting the arrangements made between Silas Deane and Beaumarchais, under the very eyes of the minister, to endeavour to discover

* "Life of Franklin," by J. Sparks, p. 449.

the real intentions of the latter, in an affair about which, owing to its very secrecy, he has naturally left but few documents in his own handwriting.

A first proof of the falseness of the assertions made by Arthur Lee is given us by one of those rather comic incidents, which, in the life of the author of "The Barber of Seville," are always mixed up with the most serious things, and which we must relate because it tends to support our theory. When Silas Deane, the first agent of the Congress, arrived in Paris, in July, 1776, Beaumarchais, although the most ardent, was not the only advocate the insurgents had with the minister. An old physician, named Dubourg, who understood botany very well, who had formerly been intimate with Franklin in England, and who was very active in the cause of the Americans, rivalled him in zeal. Franklin, before being sent himself to France, had sent Silas Deane to Dr. Dubourg. This Doctor, in whom M. de Vergennes placed much trust, had been confidentially informed of the intentions of the minister; to give his assistance secretly to different commercial enterprises, which were to send provisions to the Americans; and he was in hopes that he and some friends would be chosen to direct an enterprise of this kind, when he heard that the minister, who was apparently more convinced of Beaumarchais' ability than of his, had given him the preference.

Vexed at being supplanted by the author of "The Barber of Seville," the old Doctor wrote the following letter to M. de Vergennes:

"Monseigneur,—I saw M. de Beaumarchais this morning, and I willingly conferred with him without reserve. Everybody is acquainted with his ability, and no one does more justice than I, to his rectitude, his discretion, and his zeal for all that is good and great. I believe him to be one of the most fit men in the world for political negotiations, but perhaps, at the same time, one of the least fitted for negotiating in a mercantile sense. He likes splendour; it is asserted that he maintains young ladies at his expense; in short, he passes for a prodigal: and in France, *there is no merchant nor manufacturer who is not of this opinion, and who would not hesitate very much to transact the least business with him.* For this reason, I was much surprised to hear that you had not only commissioned him to assist us with his intelligence, but that you had concentrated in him *the entire and particular direction of all the commerce, exports as well as imports, either of munitions of war, or of the usual products of France to the United Colonies, and of the Colonies to France; the direction of all business, the arrangement of prices, the conclusion of all treaties, the making of all engagements,* &c. I agreed with him that the advantage of having all these affairs managed a little more secretly might be the result; but I represented to him that in taking all this immense traffic upon himself, and by excluding people who had gone to so much expense, suffered so much fatigue, and run so many dangers during the year for the service of the Congress, he would be giving them cause to accuse him of monopoly; he told me it could not possibly injure them, and used all his eloquence to prove this to me. I acknowledge that these private motives would not alone be sufficient to weigh against the secrecy necessary for such a critical position; but I must be allowed

to think that there are other, if not better means of ensuring this important secret. There may be a hundred, there may be a thousand persons in France, who, with talents very inferior to those of M. de Beaumarchais, could accomplish your wishes better, by inspiring all those with whom they may have to treat with more confidence."

Before relating how the author of "The Barber of Seville" refuted the old Doctor's accusations, we must observe how important this letter is, as throwing light upon a question which it was rather difficult to penetrate, and which has given rise to the most bitter disputes in the United States.

This letter, which proves that Dr. Dubourg was acquainted with the minister's intentions, also proves clearly, by the passages in italics, that in granting secret aid to the commercial company founded by Beaumarchais, M. de Vergennes did not intend that the operations of this house should only have a *fictitious* commercial character. It proves, in fine, that there was an intention of assisting several real merchants; it also proves that the minister thought the enterprise would support itself with the money of traders, and that it would be kept up by the profits resulting from the returns in kind, on which Beaumarchais had a right to count, according to the formal engagements entered into by the agent of the Congress.

We must now describe the effect produced by Dr. Dubourg's accusing Beaumarchais, to M. de

Vergennes, of keeping ladies in his house. The minister, notwithstanding his gravity, thought it would be a joke to send the Doctor's letter to Beaumarchais, who, without doubt, to amuse M. de Vergennes, sent him a copy of his answer to Dr. Dubourg. It was conceived in the following terms:

"Tuesday, 16th July, 1776.

"Till M. le Comte de Vergennes showed me your letter to him, Sir, I found it impossible to understand the one with which you had honoured me. I could not conceive what was meant by the gentleman *who will not and cannot undertake anything with me.** I very well understand now that you wished to give yourself time to write to the minister about me; but in order to receive true information, was it necessary to give him false? How does it affect our business if I like pomp and splendour, and maintain young ladies in my house? The ladies in my house, who have been there for twenty years, Sir, are your very humble servants. They were five in number, four sisters and a niece. During the last three years two of these girls have died, to my great sorrow. I now only keep three, two sisters, and my niece; which is, however, display enough for a private individual like myself. But what would you have thought if, knowing me better, you had been aware that I carried the scandal so far as to keep men too, two nephews, very young and rather good-looking, and even the miserable father who brought such a scandalous person into the world?†

* This passage alludes to Silas Deane, who had just arrived, and whom Beaumarchais had not yet seen, because Dr. Dubourg had dissuaded him from associating with him.

† This answer of Beaumarchais was, it appears, very successful in the family, for I find Julie taking up the subject, and writing to her brother a letter which commences thus:—"*Monsieur l'entre-*

As for my love of splendour, that is much worse. For three years I have considered lace and embroidered clothes too mean for my vanity, and have been proud enough to have my wrists ornamented with the finest plain muslin. The most superb black cloth is not too splendid for me, and I have sometimes carried my love of dress so far as to wear silk when it is very warm; but I beg of you, Sir, not to tell this to M. de Vergennes, you would quite ruin me in his opinion. You had your reasons for writing against me to him, without knowing me; I have mine for not being offended, although I have the honour of knowing you. You are, Sir, a good man, so inflamed with the desire of doing much good that you consider yourself entitled to do a little mischief in order to succeed. This is not exactly the moral of the Gospel, but I have known many people adopt it. It was in this sense that in order to convert heathens, the Fathers of the Church allowed themselves to make quotations of doubtful authenticity, holy calumnies which they named pious frauds among themselves. But an end to joking. I am not out of temper, because M. de Vergennes is not a small-minded man, and I

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teneur, I feel myself compelled to tell you, that your letter to the Doctor has made quite a hit amongst us; the girls you keep are 'your very humble servants,' but on condition of your increasing their allowance;" and, after developing this idea, Julie concludes, as usual, with some verses, which are more lively than poetical, such as she took a pleasure in introducing into everything she wrote:—

"For if you will believe us,
You will much increase the glory
Of the favours with which you load us,
By doubling the sum you allow us.

"I am in expectation of this wished-for moment, Monsieur l'entre-teneur. "Yours, &c.,

"JULIE B."

It is probable that Julie gained an increased allowance through the Doctor's letter.

can rely upon his answer. Let those whom I ask for advances in business mistrust me; I consent to it; but let those who are animated by true zeal for the common friends, whose interests are at stake, think twice before forsaking an honourable man, who offers to render every service, and to make every advance which would be useful to those friends. Do you now understand me, Sir?

"I shall have the honour of seeing you this afternoon sufficiently early to find you all together. I have also that of being, with the greatest respect, Sir, your very humble and obedient servant, well known under the name of *Roderigue Hortalez and Company.*"*

Spain having already brought good fortune to the author of "The Barber of Seville," it was under the name of "Roderigue Hortalez & Co.," which was intended to mislead the English ambassador, that Beaumarchais concealed the fact that he was secretly assisted by the court of France. Notwithstanding the disinclination of Dr. Dubourg, Beaumarchais and Silas Deane came together at last. The agent of the Congress had been secretly presented by this same Dr.

* Dr. Dubourg always had a spite against Beaumarchais on account of the preference shown him by M. de Vergennes, and as he was very intimate with Franklin when the latter rejoined Silas Deane in France, the Doctor set him against Beaumarchais, which was a new obstacle in addition to all those which already crossed his path. But the Doctor was punished for his jealousy, for, not being able to obtain the co-operation of the ministry in his commercial projects, he fitted out a little ship on his own account. This ship was taken and confiscated by the English, who awarded the Doctor's little property to themselves, *gratis*.

Dubourg to M. de Vergennes, on the 17th July, 1776. The position of the rebellious colonies was at this time very critical. They struggled with courage, but they had exhausted the ruinous resource of paper money. They were in want of arms and ammunition, their troops were half naked; whilst England, resolved to sacrifice everything to crush the rebellion, had sent General Howe with considerable reinforcements to America. The American troops had lost several battles, and the Congress itself was on the point of being driven from Philadelphia, which was occupied by the English, to take refuge in Baltimore. The next campaign was to be decisive; and it was generally supposed in Europe that the Americans would be crushed. In this state of affairs the Congress sent Silas Deane to Paris, to try and obtain on credit from the government, or from private individuals, two hundred cannons, arms, ammunition and clothing, and tents for 25,000 men. M. de Vergennes naturally gave a formal refusal to the agent of the Congress, founded upon the pacific relations between France and England. But he directed him to go to Beaumarchais, describing him as a *merchant*, who might perhaps assist him on reasonable terms. The next day Beaumarchais wrote the following letter to Silas Deane:

"Paris, 18th July, 1776.

"I do not know, Sir, whether you have any trustworthy person with you, to translate French letters on important

business. For my part, I shall not be able to correspond with you in English till the arrival of a person whom I expect from London, and who will interpret for us.* Meanwhile, I have the honour of informing you that some time ago, I formed the project of assisting the brave Americans to throw off the English yoke. I have tried several means of opening a safe and secret correspondence between the Congress and a house of business which I am about to form, for the purpose of providing the Americans with those things which they require, and cannot obtain from England. I have already mentioned my plan to a gentleman † in London, who professes to be much attached to America; but as our correspondence has been continued with difficulty and in cipher, I have received no answer to my last letter, in which I settled a few points in this great and important affair. Since you are endowed with a disposition, Sir, in which I can place confidence, I shall be happy to renew, in a more certain and regular manner, a negotiation which has only begun to bud as yet. My means are not at present very considerable, but they will increase very much if we can arrange a treaty together, the conditions of which are honourable and advantageous, and the fulfilment exact.

"I have the honour to be, Sir,

"Yours, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS." ‡

* Silas Deane knew very little French; all his letters, both to the ministers and to Beaumarchais, are written in English, and Beaumarchais, although he had lived in England, knew nothing of English but the celebrated word which he has given in "The Marriage of Figaro," as the foundation of the language.

† It will be understood that the gentleman in question was Arthur Lee.

‡ Not having been able to find among Beaumarchais' papers this first letter of his, which is important for all that follows, I have been

It will be seen that from the very beginning of the transactions between Beaumarchais and the agent of the Congress, there was no ambiguity about the nature of the affair. It was not a gift which Beaumarchais was to make, but a commercial treaty, which was to be strictly fulfilled. However, as it would have been too great a chance for any real merchant to undertake this action at his sole risk and peril, and as the author of "The Barber of Seville" was not a merchant by profession, it was not difficult for Silas Deane to suspect, even if he had not known it from Dr. Dubourg, that the man to whom he was desired to address himself, was more or less upheld by the ministry. While recognising Beaumarchais then to be what he was represented to be, that is to say, a trader acting in his name, he was (in the absence of the guilty connivance, of which Arthur Lee very unjustly accused him) to keep the ministry informed of all the engagements which this merchant desired him to make. And he did so, as is proved by the following letter, written by Silas Deane, under the date of July 19, 1776, to the confidential secretary of M. de Vergennes, M. Gérard, afterwards Ambassador from France to the United States, and then First Commissioner of Foreign Affairs. This letter proves that Silas Deane

obliged to reproduce it, as exactly as possible, from an English translation, which is among the documents given to the Congress of the United States by Silas Deane.

informed M. Gérard of the first letter of M. de Beaumarchais, whom he had not seen, and asked his advice as to what he should do. "I have not yet had the pleasure of seeing M. de Beaumarchais," writes Silas Deane to M. Gérard, "but I am quite confident, from what you have told me of him, that he will be able to procure the things I require, and that I ought to address myself to him in preference to any one else. I think he would provide me with everything mentioned in my instructions, with the greatest secrecy and certainty." The same day the first conference took place between Beaumarchais and the agent of the Congress, for the next day Silas Deane wrote the following letter to Beaumarchais:

"Paris, Hotel Grand-Villars,
"20th July, 1776.

"Monsieur,—In conformance with your request at our interview yesterday, I inclose you a copy of my commission and an extract from my instructions, which will prove to you that I am authorized to make the acquisitions for which I have applied to you. In order to enable you to understand this extract, I must inform you that I was first desired to address myself to the ministers, that I might either purchase or borrow from them the provisions necessary for us; and in case the credit and influence of the Congress should not be sufficient in the present circumstances, I was commissioned to try and procure them somewhere else. I have already informed you of my request to the minister, and of his answer.

"With regard to the credit which we require for the provisions and ammunition which I hope to obtain from you, a

long credit will not, I trust, be necessary. A year is the longest credit my compatriots are accustomed to take, and the Congress having bought a quantity of tobacco in Virginia and Maryland, together with some other articles which will be embarked as soon as ships can be procured, I have no doubt that considerable returns in kind will be made to you between now and six months' time, and that all will be paid in the course of a year. This is what I shall press on the Congress in my letter. In the meanwhile, the result of the war is uncertain, and our commerce may suffer by it; but I hope that whatever may happen you will soon receive sufficiently considerable returns to be able to wait. In case any sum remains due to you after the credit agreed upon has expired, it is perfectly understood that the usual interest shall be allowed you for that sum.

"As soon as you have been able to get this letter and the inclosed translated, I shall have the honour to pay you a visit. Meanwhile, I am, with all respect and attachment,

"Yours, &c.

"SILAS DEANE."

Beaumarchais answered this letter of Silas Deane's by a letter dated the 22nd July, in which, after agreeing to the payment in natural products, and to the delay demanded by the agent of the Congress, he speaks in the following manner about the price of the provisions:

"As I believe that I am to deal with a virtuous nation, it will be enough for me to keep an exact account of all I advance. The Congress will be at liberty to pay the usual value of the things on their arrival, or to allow so much for the cost price, the delays and the inconvenience, with a commission in proportion to the trouble and care,

which it is impossible to arrange now. I wish to serve your country as if it were my own, and I hope to find in the friendship of a noble-minded nation the true reward of the labour which I willingly undertake for them."

The agent of the Congress agrees to this arrangement with gratitude, in the following letter, which will at the same time give us an idea of the difficulties of the undertaking, and consequently of the services rendered by Beaumarchais to the United States:

"Paris, 24th July, 1776.

"Sir,—I read attentively the letter with which you honoured me on the 22nd, and I think your propositions concerning the arrangements for paying the merchandise and ammunition are most just and equitable. The generous confidence which you place in the virtue and justice of my constituents, causes me the greatest joy, gives me the greatest hopes of the success of the enterprise, both to their satisfaction and yours, and causes me to assure you again that the United States will take the most efficacious means to send you the natural products, and to justify in every way the feelings you have for them. However, as the cost of the clothing alone would amount to two or three millions, and as the cannons, the arms, and ammunition will greatly increase the sum, I cannot, on account of the uncertainty with which ships arrive during war time, go so far as to assure you that the returns for the whole will reach you within the time specified; but in that case, as I have already said, you will, I believe, be allowed interest for the balance. As for the cargoes sent from America, either to France or to the West Indies, in return for your advances, I think there can be no objection to their being addressed, either to your house in France, or to your agents in whatever place they may arrive.

"I see that the exportation of cannons, arms, and war ammunition is prohibited, and that consequently these things can only be exported in secret. This circumstance causes me much uneasiness, for if I cannot land them publicly, I also cannot procure them openly without causing alarm, which would perhaps be fatal to our operations. You know that the English ambassador is very attentive to all I do, and that his spies watch every movement of those with whom I am connected. In such a situation, and knowing so little of your language, I foresee many difficulties, which I hardly know how to face, and which will perhaps embarrass even you, notwithstanding your superior intelligence and ability. You will agree that two things are at present as essential as cannons and arms; the first is, that they should be of good quality,* and the second, that they should be embarked without being stopped and detained. The fate of my country depends greatly on the arrival of this assistance. I cannot be too anxious on the subject, and there is no danger nor expense, however great, which ought not to be risked, if necessary, for such an important object. I beg of you to reflect deeply on the subject, and to write me what you think of it. I went to your house to-day with Dr. Bancroft, with the intention of conferring on the subject with you, but you had gone to Versailles. Allow me to call your attention particularly to the latter subjects, and to assure you that I have the honour to be, with the greatest respect,

"Sir, yours, &c.,

"SILAS DEANE."

* It has often been stated by writers that the supplies provided by Beaumarchais for the Congress were generally of inferior quality. There may have been neglect in some particulars, which may be explained by the difficulties with which the affair was surrounded, but, on the whole, the accusation has no foundation. I see by Beaumarchais' papers that the American agents carefully inspected the cargoes before their departure.

We consider these letters sufficient to decide the precise nature of the affair, and the very formal and incontestable engagements made by the agent of the Congress. We have considered it necessary to enter into these details, because the result was most extraordinary. If a fresh proof is necessary that neither Beaumarchais nor Silas Deane made their arrangements without the knowledge of the minister, I can give one by quoting a passage from a letter from Silas Deane to M. de Vergennes, dated November 18, 1776, which shows that the agent for the Congress, acknowledging as he did, the position taken by the government, which declared itself a perfect stranger to the affair, nevertheless kept the minister informed of what passed between him and Beaumarchais.

"I write to you," says Silas Deane to M. de Vergennes, "in consequence of your interview with M. de Beaumarchais this morning. I wish for your general direction and advice on this delicate, critical, and important business, before any ulterior and public operation."

This operation was indeed a most difficult one, for it related to a kind of commerce which was officially prohibited, the prohibition of which was rigorously watched over by the English ambassador, and which was only to receive the support of the French government so long as this support was kept secret. The least indiscretion, the least diplomatic embarrassment it occasioned, would change the assistance

of the ministry to persecution. It was on these conditions that the author of "The Barber of Seville" was to take quietly, and by instalments, from the different state arsenals, 200 cannons, mortars, shells, cannon balls; 25,000 guns, 200,000 pounds of powder;* to get clothing and tents for 25,000 men; to collect these things in different ports, to send them to the insurgents, and to do all this without arousing the suspicions of the English ambassador. But it was not in vain that Beaumarchais had taken for his motto, "My life is a combat." When once made sure of the consequences of the affair, by the arrangements of Silas Deane, he hired an immense house, called the Hôtel de Hollande, in the Faubourg du Peuple, installed himself in it with

* It seems that the Americans were at this time in want of powder. They were doubtless not perfect enough in the way of making it to obtain it at home. We must mention here, that the arms and ammunition taken from the state arsenals were not given gratis to Beaumarchais. This we learn from an unpublished letter from the minister of war, Count de St. Germain, dated 25th August, 1776, to the Count de Vergennes, which I have extracted from Beaumarchais' papers. "This company," writes M. de St. Germain, "will pay in ready money for the cannon at the rate of forty sous per pound of metal, the cast-iron at the rate of ninety francs per thousand, and the guns at twenty-three francs. *In case it should ask for time, it would give good security.*"

In another letter, addressed to Beaumarchais, dated 30th June, 1776, the minister of war writes to him about the powder which had been sent for, and which was to be replaced in three months, "I should tell you that the powder which you will have to replace cannot be received till after having been tried according to the regulations."

his officers and clerks, and in a single day, from being a comic author, became a Spanish merchant, known by the name of Roderigue Hortalez & Co. In a few months, in the midst of obstacles too long to narrate, he had collected at Havre and Nantes all the above-named articles. Silas Deane had promised to provide American ships for conveying the cargoes, but these ships did not come, and it was important that the aid should arrive in time for the campaign of 1777. Beaumarchais arranged with some shipowners, and provided the vessels. Owing to a letter from Arthur Lee, who accused him of it as a crime afterwards, Silas Deane requested that some artillery and engineer officers might be enrolled and sent at the same time as the cannons and the cannon balls. Beaumarchais prevailed upon the minister to close his eyes to this new operation. He himself enlisted forty or fifty officers, who were to go singly to Havre and embark under the conduct of a superior officer of artillery, named Ducoudray.*

* These officers, who were enrolled by Beaumarchais and Silas Deane, and who preceded Lafayette to America, had not all the same success. Many had pretensions superior to their capacity; the Americans, on their side, were very jealous, and quarrels arose. It was Beaumarchais, however, who sent those French and foreign officers who distinguished themselves the most after Lafayette, such as the Marquis de La Rouërie, much loved by Washington, of whom Chateaubriand speaks in his "Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe," the Count de Conway, an Irishman, the Polish general Pulawski, and particularly the

However, notwithstanding all the precautions taken, the expedition had made some noise. We read in a letter from the lieutenant of police to M. de Vergennes, dated December 12, 1776, the following lines:—"The arrival of Dr. Franklin at Nantes creates much sensation; and the departure of M. de Beaumarchais, who is said to have gone to Havre, does not cause less." To avoid any quarrel with the English ambassador, it had been decided among the ministers that this embarcation of officers and ammunition should be represented as destined by the minister of the Admiralty for the French colonies; but the expedition was considerable, merchant ships were employed instead of government vessels, the officers who were to embark, had been indiscreet, and the presence of Beaumarchais at Havre greatly increased the anxiety of the English ambassador. Although the author of "The Barber of Seville" had set out under the name of Durand, if we may judge by a letter from one of the officers to Silas Deane, he had betrayed his incognito by occupying himself

old general Steuben, a fellow-soldier of Frederic's, who rendered great service by setting the American militia on a good footing. It is amusing to find the author of "The Barber of Seville" recommending this old general to the Congress, and writing on war. "The art of making war successfully," said he, "being the fruit of courage, united with prudence, talent, and experience, a fellow-soldier of Frederic the Great, who did not leave his side for twenty-two years, seems to all of us to be one of the fittest men to second M. Washington."

characteristically with literary affairs during this important business. "I think," writes this officer, "that M. de Beaumarchais' journey has done more harm than good: he was already known to many people, and he has made himself known to the whole town by having his own comedies played, and by hearing the actors rehearse their parts, so as to play them better. All this has rendered his precaution of concealing himself under the name of Durand, perfectly useless."

Beaumarchais, on the contrary, declares that he alone had been able to check the indiscretion of the officers. However this may have been, Lord Stormont had addressed the most vehement remonstrances to the government. The king, who did not wish for war, and the ministry, who were not in a position to make it, feared to advance too far. A counter-order had been sent to Havre and Nantes, forbidding the officers to embark, and the ships to start, but when the counter-order arrived, the strongest of Beaumarchais' three ships, the "Amphitrite," with the greater part of the officers and munitions, had already set sail. The two others were alone detained. Beaumarchais returned in all haste, and took the greatest trouble to obtain the revocation of the counter-order. The following note from M. de Vergennes to his first clerk, M. Gérard, shows how delicate the position of ministers was in an affair of this kind:

"M. de Beaumarchais," says M. de Vergennes, "writes to me

on the same subject, and observes that he wishes to have this permission (the revocation of the counter-order) from me: but I shall take care not to give it him, although *I have it in writing*;* but as M. de Sartines has very fortunately been charged with this commission, and I shall send it to him, I beg of you to express yourself accordingly in your answer to the Americans, without letting them see through the masks."

At last Beaumarchais obtained leave to send off the two other ships; but just as they were going to set sail, news arrived that the "Amphitrite," which was supposed to be far away, instead of continuing her voyage, had stopped twice, once at Nantes and once at Lorient, where the ship still was, because the accommodation on board did not satisfy M. Ducoudray. This caused fresh complaints from Lord Stormont. M. de Vergennes, irritated at being again compromised, withdrew the revocation of the counter-order which Beaumarchais had received. M. Ducoudray wrote him a letter, which was full of confused explanations and excuses. Beaumarchais, enraged, answered as follows:

"Paris, January 22, 1777.

"Sir,—As your whole conduct in this affair is inexplicable, I shall not take the useless trouble of studying it. It will be sufficient for me to protect myself and my friends from it for

* This seems to me to show that, on account of the serious consequences which might result from the government taking part in Beaumarchais' operations, each minister, when some decision had to be taken, required a written order from the king's hand. I see no other way of explaining M. de Vergennes' phrase.

the future. Consequently, and as real owner of the vessel 'Amphitrite,' I order Captain Fautrelle to take the sole command of it. You are intelligent enough to be sure that I have not taken this step without first consulting some powerful and wise friends. Consequently, you will have the kindness, Sir, to obey, or to find another ship and go where you please, as I have no intention of interfering with you in anything but what relates to me, and may injure me. On the receipt of this letter you will kindly put Captain Fautrelle in possession of all the parcels, orders, and letters relating to the delivery of the cargo of his ship, and to send me by M. de Francy an account in detail of all you have spent in your astonishing and very unnecessary voyages, if it be your intention to make us pay the expenses, which question will be decided by the committee of our affairs. I have the honour, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

At the same time Beaumarchais wrote to his confidential agent, M. de Francy,* who had set off for Lorient:

"Paris, 28th January, 1777.

"I must say, like Bartholo, 'the devil has interfered in my

* One word about this M. de Francy, who will be often mentioned. He was a distinguished young man, in whom Beaumarchais placed great confidence, and whom he afterwards sent as his representative to America, where he was very useful to him. Francy served his patron loyally, and, to Beaumarchais' great satisfaction, made a large fortune; unfortunately he was consumptive and died young. I have many letters from him, which contain very interesting details about persons and things in America at the time of the Revolution, and which, while doing honour to his intelligence and the loftiness of his sentiments, prove the sincerity and vivacity of an affection which was shared by all who approached Beaumarchais. I should add that Théveneau de Francy was the younger brother of Théveneau de Morande,

business,' and we must remedy the past evil as well as we can, by preventing its recurrence. Give the inclosed letter to M. Ducoudray. I send it you open, that you may answer for me any objections he may make. Show Captain Fautrelle the order, which we send to him with this, as proprietor of the vessel which he commands, and take his word of honour for his exact fulfilment of it. Yesterday, I received with your letter one from my nephew. As childish as the others, my nephew seems uneasy about going on board the 'Amphitrite.'* You may think how little attention I pay to this puerility; recommend him again to the care of M. de Conway, and to Chevalier de Bore. Order the Captain to receive on board the Marquis de la Rouërie, who has been particularly recommended to us. Give the Captain the general and secret directions as to his real route, and what he is to do when arrived at his destination. If circumstances oblige him to stop at St. Domingo, tell him and M. de Conway not to remain there, but to write to M. le Comte d'Emery from the roads,† saying that unfortunate circumstances alone have determined the fictitious course of the 'Amphitrite' towards St. Domingo, and to take from him a fresh fictitious order for France, so as to shelter himself under this order, in case of

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who was mentioned in one of our former chapters, but in his idea of morality he did not resemble his brother; accordingly Beaumarchais, while keeping one at a distance, had discerned the merit of the other, and had become attached to him.

* This nephew of Beaumarchais, a son of the watchmaker, De Lépine, and who had taken the name of Des Epiniers, set out for America as an artillery officer. The evening before one of the battles, he wrote to his uncle:—"Your nephew, my dear uncle, may be killed, but he will never do anything unworthy of a person who has the honour of being related to you. This is as certain as that he will always feel the greatest affection for the best uncle living." Des Epiniers died, I believe, in America, holding the rank of major.

† The Governor of St. Domingo.

meeting with an English vessel between St. Domingo and the true destination of the ship. You know, very well, that all the precautions of the ministry are taken by agreement with us: this can be relied upon.

"Immediately after the departure of the 'Amphitrite,' we shall go to Nantes, where I fear, however, you will find the 'Mercure' gone, for she is ready to set sail. Good bye, my dear Francy; come back quickly to Paris. You will have travelled enough for one time: other tasks wait you here; but I will share the labour. Bring me back this letter."

In spite of all these *contre-temps* Beaumarchais' first three ships were at last able to start. They were fortunate enough to escape the English cruisers, and arrived, at the commencement of the campaign of 1777, in the roads of Portsmouth. On receiving, for the first time from Europe, such a cargo of cannons, powder, guns, coats, and shoes for 25,000 men, the Americans who were assembled on the shore, expressed great delight. On his part the American agent at Paris, Silas Deane, on the 29th November, 1776, wrote as follows to the secret committee of the Congress:

"I should never have succeeded in fulfilling my mission without the indefatigable, generous, and intelligent efforts of M. de Beaumarchais, to whom the United States owe more in every respect than to any other person on this side of the ocean. He is greatly in advance for ammunition, articles of clothing, equipment, and other things, and I firmly trust that you will let him have considerable returns as promptly as possible. He wrote you by M. Macrery, and he will write to you again by this ship. I could not in a letter render full

justice to M. de Beaumarchais for his skill and zeal in maintaining our cause; all I can say is, that in this operation he has acted in accordance with the most large and liberal principles, and that he has made our affairs entirely his own. His influence and reputation, which are great, have been entirely employed in serving our interests, and I hope the results will be equal to his desires."

Beaumarchais naturally expected to receive as quickly as possible from the Congress, plenty of thanks, and plenty of tobacco from Virginia and Maryland; he did not even receive an answer to his letters. These returns, which, after the formal promises of Silas Deane, were to have arrived in six months, did not arrive at all. Beaumarchais sent two more ships with two more cargoes, but no news from the Congress. Silas Deane was confused, and could not explain this silence. Both of them had reckoned without Arthur Lee, who had just been appointed, with Franklin, to the American deputation in France. Franklin arrived at Paris in December, 1776; Arthur Lee arrived at the end of the same month. His first confidential letter to the secret committee of the Congress, dated January 3, 1777, is very characteristic. "The politics of this court," he writes, "are in a kind of trembling agitation." It would never be guessed why.

"It is because," adds Lee, "the promises which were made to me by the French agent in London, and which I communicate to you through M. Storey, have not been entirely

fulfilled. The change in the mode of transmission from what had been promised, had been planned with M. Deane, whom Hortalez or Beaumarchais found here on his return from London, and with whom all the arrangements have been made."

In another confidential letter, Lee has the audacity to write:

"M. de Vergennes, the minister and his secretary, have repeatedly assured us that no return was expected for the cargoes sent by Beaumarchais. This gentleman is not a merchant; he is known to be a political agent, employed by the court of France."

The documents we have quoted, the very plain declaration of M. de Vergennes, which we shall quote in its place, as well as the letters from Beaumarchais to the minister, authorize us in affirming that this assertion of Arthur Lee's was a remarkable falsehood. He appears himself to suffer some trouble from this falsehood, for in a letter which follows the one we have just quoted, he writes: "The ministry *has often given us to understand* that we had nothing to pay for the cargoes supplied by Beaumarchais; however, the latter, with the perseverance of adventurers of his kind, persists in his demands."

It is useless to call attention to the fact that letters of this kind are always letters signed by Arthur Lee alone, and written without the knowledge of his two colleagues. Placed between the contradic-

tory affirmations of Silas Deane and Arthur Lee, the secret committeé of the Congress waited for Franklin's evidence, and Franklin remained silent. From the first day of the meeting of the three American commissioners at Paris, Deane and Arthur Lee were at daggers drawn. Franklin, already prejudiced against the author of "The Barber of Seville," by his friend, Dr. Dubourg, and in the vain hope of being at peace with Arthur Lee, had resolved to sacrifice Beaumarchais to him, declaring to Deane that he would not in any way interfere with the transactions made between the two. It must be added to this, that this same officer, Ducoudray, whom we have already seen so sharply reprimanded by Beaumarchais, had arrived in America, furious against him, and that after writing to him, in France, the most perplexed and the most humble letter, he had commenced in the United States by publishing a calumnious pamphlet about him. *

To complete, finally, our explanation of the attitude of the secret committee of the Congress, which would otherwise be inexplicable, we must say that the letters of Beaumarchais himself were sufficiently strange, from their mixture of the patriotic and mercantile spirit, both equally sincere with him, to inspire

* Shortly after his arrival in America this officer, who was the brother of the celebrated barrister Tronçon-Ducoudray, was drowned at the passage of a river.

distrust in minds already prejudiced. Only imagine serious Yankees, who had nearly all been traders before becoming soldiers, receiving masses of cargoes, which were frequently embarked by stealth during the night, and the invoices of which consequently presented some irregularities,—and all this without any other letters of advice than the rather bombastic missives signed with the romantic name of Roderigue Hortalez & Co., in which Beaumarchais mixed up protestations of enthusiasm, offers of unlimited service and political advice, with applications for tobacco, indigo, or salt-fish, and which ended with tirades, of which we may take the following as an example:

"Gentlemen, consider my house as the head of all operations useful to your cause in Europe; and myself, as the most zealous partisan of your nation, *the soul of your successes*, and a man most profoundly filled with the respectful esteem, with which

"I have the honour to be, &c.,
"RODERIGUE HORTALEZ & Co."

The calculating disposition of the Yankees, naturally inclined them to think, that so ardent and fantastic a being, if, after all, such a being really existed, was playing a commercial comedy, agreed upon between the French government and himself, and that they might in all security of conscience make use of his supplies, read his amplifications, and dispense with sending him tobacco. Beaumarchais, however, was

in a cruel position. Relying upon the execution of the engagement made by the agent of the Congress, he had set up his undertaking on an immense scale: he had freighted ships, made contracts with shipowners, entered into partnership with merchants,* and given considerable orders. In September, 1777, he had sent to the Congress cargoes to the amount of five millions, without even receiving an answer to the letters sent with them. The Congress persisted in regarding him as a fictitious personage. In vain he wrote to it in December, 1777: "I am exhausted, both as regards money and credit. Relying too much on returns so many times promised, I have gone far beyond my own funds and those of my friends. I have even exhausted other powerful aid,

* I see, from his papers, that he had partners of different kinds, shipowners, merchants, and even of a kind which would scarcely have been expected; for instance, in the following year, when he was trading not only with the Congress of the United States, but with private individuals, he wrote to the supercargo of one of his ships, under date of March 14, 1778:—"In the general invoice that you will have to send me of the entire supply of the items which concern the Marquis de Saint-Aignan and the Marquis of Aubespine, instead of putting their names in full, only indicate them by initials; they may desire one day that their names should not be mentioned in a commercial affair; and provided they and myself can understand it, that will be sufficient for the present." Thus the taste for commerce was not exclusively the attribute of the author of "The Barber of Seville:" we find the highest nobles, who, instead of going to "get their heads broken with the insurgents," as used to be said at the time, preferred selling their little stores through the medium of Beaumarchais.

which I had first of all obtained under the express promise of returning it before long." The documents deposited in the Archives of Foreign Affairs prove, nevertheless, that in this same year, 1777, M. de Vergennes, taking into consideration the desperate troubles in which Beaumarchais found himself plunged through the obstinacy of the Congress in refusing him returns, advanced to him successively, May 31, 400,000 livres; June 16, 200,000 livres; July 3, 474,496 livres. But what he had already supplied, without speaking of his losses, of which we will say a word further on, already went far beyond the subvention of 3,000,000, which he received from the State.

Determined to see clearly into the intrigue which prevented the government of the United States from fulfilling the engagements of Silas Deane, Beaumarchais at last sent to America the young De Francy, with the double mission of obtaining justice from Congress for the past, and preventing for the future his cargoes from being delivered gratuitously. I will here quote two of his unpublished letters to Francy, because they exhibit him in his true aspect, as ardent in his intimate correspondence as in his official letters, and with the same variety of inclinations and instincts, which has already struck us more than once.

"Paris, December 20, 1777.

"I profit, my dear Francy, by every opportunity to give you news of myself; do the same with me, I beg of you.

"Although to-day is December 20, 1777, my large vessel has not yet started; but this is rather a common accident with all merchant vessels destined for America. The minister was afraid commerce might deprive the navy of too many sailors at once, at a time when from any one moment to another it may have need of them. The most strict orders have been given in all the ports, but above all in the one where I am fitting out. It appears that the strength and size of my ship have caused Lord Stormont to make some objections, from which the minister feared he was perhaps suspected of favouring an operation, which, in truth, takes place without his assistance, and even in spite of him. When ready to set sail, my artillery was taken away from me, and the trouble of getting it back, or obtaining some more, is what keeps me in port. I am struggling against obstacles of every nature; but I struggle with all my might, and hope to conquer with patience, courage, and money. The enormous losses to which all this puts me appear to affect no one; the minister is inflexible; I have no one for me, even the deputies of Passy,* claim the honour of annoying me—me, the best friend of their country. On the arrival of the 'Amphitrite,' which at last landed at Lorient a small cargo of rice and indigo, they had the injustice to take possession of it, saying it was addressed to them, and not to me; but, as M. de Voltaire very well says,

'Injustice at last produces independence.'

"Probably they had looked upon my patience as weakness, and my generosity as folly. In proportion as I am attached to the interests of America, I have considered myself insulted by the rather uncivil liberties which the deputies of Passy have wished to take with me. I have

* The American deputation, whose chief, Franklin, was residing at Passy.

written them the letter of which I send you a copy, and which they have up to this time left without an answer. In the meanwhile I have had the cargo deposited with MM. Bérard frères, and in doing so, have not considered I was derogating from my frank and generous conduct towards the Congress, but only using my most lawful right over the first and very slight return for an enormous advance; this cargo is only worth 150,000 livres. You see that there is a great difference between this drop of water and the ocean of my debts.*

"As for you, my dear friend, I imagine you have arrived. I imagine you have obtained from the Congress some reasonable advance on account, and such as the situation of American affairs has permitted it to give you. I imagine that according to my instructions you have obtained tobaccos, and are still obtaining them every day. I imagine that my vessels will find their return-cargoes ready to be embarked as soon as they arrive where you are. I further hope, that if events should have kept them longer than I imagine, you will have followed the advice of our friend Montieu, and that you will send me at least, by the 'Flamand,' and such other vessel as you may be able to send with it (making use of the extra guns with which Landais supplied this vessel), a cargo which will free me a little from the horrible straits I am in.

"I do not know whether I delude myself, but I believe in the good feeling and equity of the Congress, as in my own and yours. Its deputies over here are not in easy circumstances, and want often renders men deficient in delicacy: that is how I explain the injustice they have endeavoured

* These were, in fact, the first returns that arrived in Europe in one of Beaumarchais' vessels. Franklin and Lee, who, in this matter, were acting in spite of Silas Deane, did not dare to persist in their demands, and the cargo remained with Beaumarchais.

to do me.* I do not despair even of gaining them over by the calmness of my representations, and the firmness of my conduct. It is very unfortunate, my friend, for this cause, that its interests in France should have been intrusted to several persons at once. One alone would have succeeded much better, and, as far as I am concerned, I owe M. Deane the justice to say, that he is both ashamed and grieved at the conduct of his colleagues towards me, the fault of which lies altogether with M. Lee.

* This explanation may appear strange, but it is not devoid of probability, at least not at an epoch a little anterior to the one in which Beaumarchais gave it, being ignorant at the time that the French government had just advanced money secretly to the American deputies. The fact is, that the latter received no more funds from the Congress than Beaumarchais received returns in kind. Silas Deane had been obliged in the first instance to borrow from Beaumarchais the sums necessary for his personal maintenance. Arthur Lee endeavoured to make use of this fact against his colleague; but there was no mystery on this point. Far from concealing it, Beaumarchais often speaks of it in his letters to the Congress with a persistence which is perhaps not always in very good taste, but which proves at least the perfectly innocent nature of his debt, which necessity alone had forced Silas Deane to contract, as his country did not send him a sou. As for Franklin, when he landed in France he was a little richer, for he writes to his colleague, Silas Deane, from Quiberon, in December, 1776: "Our vessel brought in indigo on account of the Congress, to the value of about three thousand pounds sterling, which is to be at our orders to pay our expenses." In default of bills of exchange, Congress had at all events allowed him indigo to live upon. In the course of the year 1777, the French government itself repeatedly gave money to the deputies of Passy, to the extent of two millions, which was devoted in part to the maintenance of the agents and subagents of America in France, and in part to the purchase of merchandise for the Congress. The employment of these millions occasioned, at a later period in Congress, discussions of a sufficiently disreputable nature.

"I have also met with annoyances from the provincial Congress of South Carolina, and I am writing by L'Estargette to President Rutledge, to call upon him to do justice to himself. L'Estargette, who will write to you, will inform you what success my just representations* will have had. Through all these annoyances, the news from America overwhelms me with joy. Brave, brave people! their warlike conduct justifies my esteem, and the noble enthusiasm which is felt for them in France. Finally, my friend, I only wish for some returns then, in order to be able to serve them anew, to meet my engagements, and to be able to contract fresh ones to their advantage.†

"It appears to me, if I am to believe the news, that our Frenchmen have done wonders in all the battles of Pennsylvania. It would have been very disgraceful for me, for my country, for the French name, if their conduct had not corresponded with the nobility of the cause they had espoused, with the efforts I have made to procure employment for the greater number of them; finally, for the reputation of the military corps from which they have been drawn.

"The town of London is in a fearful commotion; the ministry is on the point of death. The Opposition is triumphant, and severely so. And the King of France, like a powerful eagle hovering above all these events, prolongs for another moment the pleasure of seeing the two parties wavering between the fear and the hope of his decision, which

* After having commenced with the general Congress, Beaumarchais also sent supplies to the different States, and was scarcely better paid by them.

† Here we have Beaumarchais in his true character, at once speculative and enthusiastic. It cannot be said that he is making a display in this case, for he is not writing officially to any person in power, but confidentially to his business agent. The words "my esteem," as well as the words "for me," in the following paragraph, are quite in his style of *naïve* self-confidence.

is to be of so much weight in the quarrel of the two hemispheres.

"To be pedantic enough to lay down your plan of conduct for you at a distance of two thousand leagues from myself, would, my dear friend, be to imitate the folly of the English minister, who wished to make war and draw up the plan of the campaign in his own closet! I profit by his lesson. Serve me as well as you can, this is your only means of rendering yourself useful to me, and to yourself, and of inspiring interest to America.

"Do like myself; despise small considerations, small measures, and small resentments. I have affiliated you to a magnificent cause, you are the agent of a man who is just and generous. Remember that success is to fortune, as the money due to me is to the chance of a great combination of events, but that my reputation is my own, as you are now the architect of yours. Let it always be good, my friend, and all will not be lost, when everything else is lost. I greet you as I esteem you and love you."

The following passage is a postscript, in which we see Beaumarchais applying to politics the resources of the stage, and combining ingeniously the means of evading the ministerial orders, just as he would have arranged a theatrical piece:

"This is what I think about my large vessel: I cannot break the promise I have given to M. de Maurepas, that my vessel should only be used for taking to St. Domingo seven or eight hundred militiamen, and that I would return without touching at any part of the Continent. However, the cargo of this vessel is of much importance to the Congress and myself. It consists of soldiers' coats ready made, of sheets, blankets, &c. It also conveys artillery to the extent of sixty-six bronze cannons, of which four pieces carry thirty-three

pounds, twenty-four pieces twenty-four pounds, twenty pieces sixteen pounds, and the rest twelve and eight pounds; besides thirty-three pieces of artillery carrying four pounds, making altogether a hundred bronze cannons, in addition to a great many other things.

"After much thinking it has occurred to me that you might arrange secretly with the secret committee of the Congress, to send immediately one or two American privateers up to St. Domingo. One of them will send his shallop to Cap Français, or will make the signal agreed upon long since for all American ships coming to the Cape, that is to say, he will *hoist a white streamer*, display the Dutch flag at the mainmast, and fire three guns; then M. Carabasse* will go on board with M. de Montaut, captain of my vessel, 'Le Fier Roderigue.' They will arrange so that on my vessel going out, the American privateer may seize it, under no matter what pretext, and take it away. My captain will protest violently, and will draw up a written statement threatening to make his complaint to the Congress. The vessel will be taken to where you are. The Congress will loudly disavow the action of the brutal privateer, and will set the vessel at liberty, with polite apologies to the French flag; during this time you will land the cargo, fill the ship with tobacco, and send it back to me as quickly as possible, with all you may happen to have ready to accompany it. As M. Carmichael is very rapid, you will have time to arrange this manœuvre, either with the Congress or with the captain of some privateer who is a friend of yours, and discreet. By this means M. de Maurepas finds himself liberated from his promise to those who have received it, and I from mine towards him, for no one can do anything against violence, and my operation will meet with success in spite of all the obstacles by which my labours have been so thickly attended.

* Beaumarchais' agent at the Cape.

"It is on the following plan, my dear friend, that I beg you to work with effect and rapidity, for my vessel will start before the 15th of June. It will have orders to wait for news from you at Cap Français.

"From all I am doing, the Congress will no longer doubt, I hope, that the most zealous partisan of the Republic in France is your friend,

"Roderigue Hortalez & Co."

The second unpublished letter, which we also print, will give an idea of the importance of Beaumarchais' armaments. It was written at the moment when war had just broken out between France and England.

"Paris, December 6, 1778.

"I send on to you the privateer 'Zephyr,' to announce to you that I am ready to put to sea a fleet of more than twelve sail, at the head of which is the 'Fier Rôderigue,' which you sent back to me, and which reached me at Rochfort on the 1st of October in good condition. This fleet can carry from five to six thousand tons, and is armed altogether like a fleet of war. Make your arrangements accordingly. If my ship the 'Ferragus,' which left Rochfort in September, has reached you, keep it to send back with my fleet. This is a joint expedition of M. de Montieu's * and my own. The cargoes have been formed in accordance with the statement which you sent me by the 'Fier Roderigue,' although, to tell the truth, I have thought more of the means of getting back my funds, than of accumulating debts without cessation. The vessels will be principally laden then with tafia, sugar, and a little coffee. Having plenty of space for the voyage out, we took whatever freight we found; but we shall bring nothing back for any one but ourselves on our return.

* A shipowner of Nantes, in partnership with Beaumarchais.

"Accordingly, we send you English hardware, cloths, gauzes, ribbons, silk-stuffs, nails, linen-cloth, cordage, attempts at various kinds of painted cloth, paper, books. brushes, and generally all the articles for which you expressed a preference. Arrange so that this fleet may remain as short a time as possible in danger; for, although powerful and very well armed, the news of its position, which will reach the people where you are, must not give time to our enemies to enable them to cut off our return. First, commerce; secondly, war.

"The fleet will reach you at earliest in the course of February, being intended to make a *détour* in order to supply our colonies with flour and salt provisions, of which they have great need, and the product of which, coming back to us in bills of exchange upon our treasurers before the return of our fleet, will enable us to meet in the meanwhile the terrible outlay to which this expedition puts us. It is not to set sail until the first days of January.

"You will receive by the 'Fier Roderigue' all my accounts with the Congress in due form, insurance included, and *without policies being supplied*, as I have been my own insurer; and it is a thing beyond doubt, according to the decision of all European commerce, that to insure, or run the risks of insurance, gives an incontestable right to the payment of insurance money. It results simply from this, that Congress will not have anything to pay for the cargoes it does not receive, and which may be captured on the voyage from the vessels sent from Europe. I will add to my account an exact statement of what I have received from the Congress in spite of the ungrateful deputation at Passy, which has disputed my right to each of the return cargoes, and which would also have taken from me that of 'La Thérèse,' if M. Pelletier, who had received the proper instructions from me, had not sold it by authority. This perpetual injustice makes me indignant, and has caused me to take an irrevocable resolution to have no further relations with the deputation as long as this rogue Lee belongs

to it. The Americans must understand their business very badly to leave so suspicious, and, above all, so impolite a man at our court.* I have been promised, *mon cher*, your captain's commission. I hope to be sufficiently fortunate to send it you by the 'Fier Roderigue;' but nevertheless, do not count on it until you have it in your hands.† You know our country; it is so great that it is always very far from the place in which a thing is promised to that in which it is given. In short, I have not had it yet, although it is promised.

"All the other details will reach you by the 'Fier.' Ah! what would you say if I enabled you on its arrival to embrace our friend Montieu on board? He is very anxious for it; but it is not yet decided.

"I have no other money for the Count de Pulaski than that which he remitted to me himself, out of which I have just paid a hundred louis for him. I will send you his account clearly made out. He was to have written to me, but I have never heard from him. I approve of what you have done for M. de Lafayette, excellent young man that he is. I am doing a service to myself when I oblige men of his disposition.‡ The advances you made to him have not yet been repaid to me; but I am in no anxiety. The same is the case with M. de la Rouërie.

* As a matter of course, we no more adopt Beaumarchais' opinion with regard to Lee than that of Lee with regard to Beaumarchais.

† This was a captain's commission in the service of the colonies, which Francy had asked Beaumarchais to obtain for him, in order to improve his position in America. Francy had been a naval cadet. Beaumarchais obtained the commission he wished for, and sent it to him with the letter which follows the present one, accompanied by epaulets, which Madame de Beaumarchais made with her own hands.

‡ Lafayette was devoured by the American usurers. "He had," to use Beaumarchais' words, "found Jerusalem at Philadelphia." Francy, who had formed an intimacy with the young general, had not hesitated to lend him money belonging to his patron.

"As for you, *mon cher*, I intend to write to you with my own hand as to what I mean to do for you. If you know me well, you must expect me to treat you as a friend. Your fate is henceforth attached to mine for life. I esteem you and love you, and you will not be long receiving the proofs. Recal me often to the memory and good wishes of Baron de Steuben. I congratulate myself, from what he tells me, of having given so great an officer to my friends the "free men," and having in a certain way forced him to follow this noble career. I am in no way uneasy about the money I lent him to start with. Never did I make so agreeable a use of capital, for I have put a man of honour in his true place. I hear that he is inspector-general of all the American troops! Bravo! Tell him that his glory is the interest of my money, and that I do not doubt that on those terms he will pay me with usury.

"I have received a letter from M. Deane, and one from M. Carmichael; assure them of my affectionate friendship.* They are brave generals, and will be as useful here to the cause of their country as this intriguing Lee is fatal to it. They have both flattered me that I shall have the pleasure of embracing them soon at Paris, which will not prevent me from writing to them by the 'Fier Roderigue,' very *fier* as it will be, to see itself at the head of a little squadron which will not allow its moustaches to be cut. It has promised on the contrary to bring me some back.†

"Farewell, my dear Francy. I am yours for life,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

* Deane had been recalled to America after the conclusion of the treaty of alliance.

† This "Fier Roderigue," the largest of Beaumarchais' vessels, was a three-decker of sixty guns. It was first of all called the "Hippopotamus." Beaumarchais rechristened it, after repairing it throughout.

CHAPTER XXII.

RELATIONS OF FRANCE WITH ENGLAND.—RECOGNITION OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.—WAR BETWEEN ENGLAND AND FRANCE.—THE "FIER RODERIGUE" IN ACTION.—BEAUMARCHAIS ON THE TREATY OF 1763.—CONGRESS, AND THE SUPPLIES.

In the midst of the commercial pre-occupations of Beaumarchais, and by the very effect of his armaments, the relations between France and England became worse and worse. The success of the American troops in the campaign of 1777, a success to which the author of "The Barber of Seville" could boast of having powerfully contributed, had raised the cause of the insurgents at the court of Versailles. The ministers did not give any more money to Beaumarchais, but they secretly gave millions to Franklin and Silas Deane. England, more and more irritated, arrogated the right of searching our merchant ships in full peace, of examining their cargoes, and of taking possession of all those which appeared to her suspicious. On the other side, seeing France disposed to ally herself with the Americans, she seemed at length to renounce all hope of overcoming them, and

prepared to make terms with them. Secret emissaries were sent from London to the American agents in Paris, and the English spoke openly of arranging any terms with America, and afterwards taking their revenge on France. Franklin and Silas Deane, while rejecting the propositions of the English agents, made use of them in treating with the French government, which it pressed to come to a decision, and to acknowledge, in fine, the independence of America. Louis XVI. and M. de Maurepas hesitated still: the king, because he did not like war; M. de Maurepas, because his great age inspired him with a strong repugnance to the embarrassments that war entails. M. de Vergennes, supported by M. de Sartines, was the most resolute. In the month of August, 1777, in reply to an insidious proposition from England, asking France to sign a treaty for guaranteeing the security of the possessions of the two kingdoms in America, the minister wrote to the king this note, which to the present time has remained unpublished:

"An agreement for insuring the possessions of the two crowns in America seems equally unbecoming and useless. It would be tying our hands, and placing in the hands of our enemy a rod always raised, of which we should feel the formidable effects each time she wished to extort from us some unjust and fresh concessions.

"If condescension does not satisfy England, she ought no longer to have a choice, and it would be prudent at all events to give from to-day, secret orders to all our commissioners at

the sea-ports, not to despatch the French vessels that may be preparing to leave, under various pretexts, which may be prolonged for a fortnight, to send vessels with intelligence to Newfoundland, to the great Bank, to our islands, and to the Levant, that they may be on their guard there, and not rashly expose themselves to the uncertainty of events."*

Beaumarchais, convinced on his side that the prolonged indecision of the government in acknowledging the independence of America might bring on peace between England and America, at the expense of France, besieged M. de Maurepas and M. de Vergennes with voluminous memorials, in which he showed, with his usual petulance, the imperious alternative which it was necessary to adopt. In one of these unpublished Memorials, dated October 26, 1777, entitled, "*Private Memorial for the Ministers of the King and Manifesto for the State,*" the agent for the Americans, after examining every side of the question, and proving that the system of inaction ought not to be continued, draws up, with the decision which characterises him, a rough draught of a manifesto for the king, Louis XVI., in case he should at length decide to acknowledge the independence of the United States: and what is rather curious is, that, taking it altogether, the substance of this sketch, proposed by Beaumarchais, the 26th October, 1777,

* England, in the preceding war, had taught us to mistrust her by attacking our vessels suddenly and without a declaration of war.

is found again in the official declaration, notified by the French government to the court of London, the 13th March, 1778. After having drawn up his manifesto, Beaumarchais begins to set forth what measures should be taken, and discusses the opinion of each minister, just as if he formed part of the council. It appears, moreover, that he only continued in writing, a discussion commenced without doubt in his presence, at the house of M. de Maurepas. It is not one of the least strange things of this period, to see the author of "The Barber of Seville" deliberating in a certain way with the ministers, saying, "I should do," &c., and putting himself with naïveté in the place of the King of France.*

The government did a portion of what Beaumarchais advised, and, at the same time that they notified to the court of London the recognition of American independence, they concluded secretly at Paris a treaty of alliance with the agents of the new State, and sent M. Gérard to Philadelphia, in the capacity of Minister Plenipotentiary, to hasten the ratification of this treaty.

The court of London, considering the recognition of the independence of the United States as a declaration of war, recalled their ambassador, and the two nations prepared for the struggle. The first

* This long address can be seen in the Appendix, No. 12.

shot was fired by England, June 18, 1778. Admiral Keppel, cruising with a fleet in sight of the coasts of France, off Morlaix, encountered the frigate, "La Belle Poule," commanded by Lieutenant Chadeau de la Clocheterie; he sent forward an English frigate, to order the French officer to come to the poop of his vessel to be examined. La Clocheterie replied that he had no examination to undergo, on the part of an English Admiral. The English frigate replied by firing a cannon. La Clocheterie returned it with his whole broadside. The action commenced between the two frigates, in sight of the squadron. In a short time the English frigate was disabled. Admiral Keppel then sent two vessels against "La Belle Poule," which retired before superior force, and entered Brest, with twenty-five men killed, and fifty-seven wounded.

This first exchange of shots was received in France with shouts of enthusiasm. The utility of this war and its results for America have since been often discussed; it is certain that the English power was not so much weakened as had been anticipated by the separation of the colonies; it is not less certain that the Americans have not always shown their gratitude for the considerable sacrifices France made for them at this period; but beyond the question of utility, there was then a question of sentiment, which was placed before everything by a nation which had not

yet been destroyed by fifty years of revolutionary crises, and the government was irresistibly drawn on by public opinion.

To the impulses of national pride, wounded by the humiliating treaty of 1763, and by the arrogance of the court of London, was added the admiration which the "insurgents" inspired. These men, seen from a distance, struggling in the name of right against might, seemed greater than ordinary men; and England, towards whom, in our alternations between fever and atony, every one turns now with looks of envy who loves order and liberty with equal ardour; England, who now fights with us against the brute force of Russia, and whose alliance is justly considered by all as the supporting point of civilization; England had then against her, not only the old popular prejudice, but the aversion with which elevated minds are always filled by a policy which is unjust, egotistical, and oppressive.

Beaumarchais prepared, on his part, to carry on war and commerce at the same time. In the first place, we find him applying for sailors to the minister of marine, M. de Sartines, for the service of his large vessel.

"Paris, December 12, 1778.

'Sir,—I have the honour to request a fresh letter to M. de Marchais, without which he swears to the great gods he will not give a single man to the 'Fier Roderigue,' which would become soon 'L'humble Roderigue,' for it can only be proud through your favours;—besides the order for

giving me cannons, cannon balls, &c., &c., by way of compensation, in place of that hard word *ready money*, with which we are reproached, while we have our hands full of lawful claims—the clearest possible—and are asking to be paid for the advances we have made, and for our supplies to the navy.

"I cannot believe, Sir, that I am to be worse treated than the lowest privateersman, because I am the boldest. I am going to cruise across the Ocean, to convoy, attack, burn or take private vessels, and, because I have sixty guns, and 160 feet of keel, I am to be worse treated than those who cannot in any way come up to us. I have too much confidence in your justice to fear it. My 'Fier Roderigue' is absolutely fitted out for war, and carries no cargo. Whilst the others will be unloading and loading, he will cruise fearlessly, and sweep the American seas. This, Sir, is his true destination. See, yourself, whether your wise order is less applicable to it, than to all the projected frigates which are yet in the wilds of the imagination, whilst the 'Fier Roderigue' is ready to plough the Atlantic as soon as you will permit him to have sailors.

"If I presented myself before you to-day, and had the honour to propose to you to construct and fit out a vessel of this importance, always fit to take the place of a king's ship, wherever I sent it, do you think, Sir, you would refuse it guns, and the title of captain for its commander? Such feeble encouragements for such great objects, would be nothing in your eyes. How, then, can it be less valuable to you, being already built, than if it had to be constructed?

"I ask your pardon, but the multiplicity of the affairs which occupy you, may have prevented your seeing the importance of my armament, which is destined for the triple object of encouraging the commerce of France by my example and my success, supplying provisions openly or secretly, to the islands which have the greatest want of them, and

conducting to the continent of America, during the most stormy times, a French merchant fleet, sufficiently important for the United States to judge by this effort of the great desire France has to support our new ties of commerce with them.

"I present these grave objects to your wise consideration; there are none, I venture to say, more worthy of the protection of so enlightened a minister.

"Accept, Sir, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

The "Fier Roderigue" sailed then with its sixty guns, convoying ten merchant vessels. Off the island of Grenada it met the fleet of Admiral d'Estaing, who was preparing to give battle to that of the English Admiral Biron. On seeing this fine vessel of war pass at a distance, strutting before the wind, he signalled to it to come up; learning that it belonged to his Majesty, Caron de Beaumarchais, he said it would be a pity not to take advantage of it, and, considering the urgency of the case assigned it its post in the battle, without asking for the authorisation of its proprietor, leaving to the mercy of the waves and the English, the unfortunate merchant vessels which this war-ship protected. The "Fier Roderigue" resigned himself bravely to his fate, took a glorious share in the battle of Grenada, and contributed in forcing Admiral Biron to retreat; but the captain was killed, and the ship riddled with balls. The very evening of the fight Count d'Estaing feeling the necessity of consoling Beau-

marchais, wrote to him from on board the Admiral's ship, and sent him, through the minister of marine, the following unpublished letter, which it is not usual to meet with in the archives of a dramatic author:

"On board the 'Languedoc,' Roadstead of
"St. George, Isle of Grenada.
"July 12, 1779.

"I have only time, Sir, to write to you that 'Le Fier Roderigue' has acted well in line, and contributed to the success of the king's arms. You will pardon me the more for having employed the ship so well, as your interests will not suffer—be certain of that. The brave M. de Montaut* has unfortunately been killed. I shall address immediately to the minister, the claims to rewards, and I hope you will assist me in soliciting those your navy has so justly merited.

"I have the honour to be, with all the sentiments you know so well how to inspire, Sir, your very humble and very obedient servant,

"ESTAING."

The minister of marine hastened to send this letter to Beaumarchais, who replied as follows to the minister:

"Paris, September 7, 1776.

"Sir,—I return you thanks for having sent me the letter from Count d'Estaing. It is very noble in him, in the moment of his triumph, to have thought that a word from his hand would be agreeable to me. I take the liberty of sending you a copy of his short letter, of which, like a good

* He was the captain of the "Fier Roderigue."

Frenchman as I am, I am proud, and at which I rejoice as a passionate lover of my country, against proud England.

"'The brave Montaut thought he could not do better to prove that he was not unworthy of the post with which he was honoured than by losing his life; whatever may be the consequence to my affairs, my poor friend Montaut has died on the bed of honour, and I feel a childish joy at being certain that those English, who have so cut me up in their papers for four years, will read therein that one of my vessels has contributed to take from them the most fertile of their possessions.

"And the enemies of M. d'Estaing, and yours especially, Sir, I see them biting their nails, and my heart leaps with joy! You know my tender and respectful devotion.

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

However, the joy of the patriot was somewhat toned down by the anguish of the merchant. The report of the second in command of the "Fier Roderigue," who had taken the command after the death of his chief, arrived at the same time as the letter of Admiral d'Estaing. This report was also very satisfactory as regarded Beaumarchais' glory, but it was very unsatisfactory as regarded his coffers. Under these circumstances the shipowner wrote to the King the following letter:

"September 11, 1779.

"Sire,—I am not going to ask you for the reward of my labours; your wise ministers know that my chief happiness would be that they should all be useful to your Majesty.

"I do not ask you for what the cruise of the 'Fier Roderigue' has cost, feeling too much honoured that a vessel of

mine should have merited the praise of the admiral by fighting in line with a victorious squadron.

"But, Sire, war is a game of kings, which crushes individuals, and scatters them like the dust. The 'Fier Roderigue' was convoying ten other ships, which were destined for commercial operations equally useful to the State in another form.

"The death of my first captain, thirty-five men unable to serve, the destruction of my vessel, the worst used of the squadron (having had three shots in the side, four in the water line, two of which went completely through; five in the masts, which damaged them much; one in the large pump which split it to pieces; forty in the sails, which have riddled them; and the remainder in the cordage, which have cut it to atoms); the entire removal of sailors from where my other vessels were put on their arrival at Fort Royal in order to complete the crews of the squadron; the order given to the 'Fier Roderigue' to repair and follow the squadron; the necessity I am under of sending fresh instructions to the new commander of my fleet, and the impossibility for more than three months of this merchant fleet, which has already lost eleven of its number, sailing under convoy of the 'Fier Roderigue' for its true destination:—all this, Sire, ruining my cruise, my advances for which have been enormous, and postponing the returns which should now have arrived, force me to implore the assistance of your Majesty.

"Let me not perish, Sire, and I am satisfied. The service that I ask is of slight importance.

"They inform me at Grenada, that they will draw upon me at sight for 90,000 livres, for the necessary repairs of the 'Fier Roderigue.'

"Out of upwards of two millions that I have advanced this year to my fleet, there only remains to be paid a hundred thousand crowns, half the 25th of this month, and half the 10th of October. I supplicate your Majesty to have the

goodness to order that this small sum of 400,000 livres may be lent me from the royal treasury for some months only. M. le Comte de Maurepas knows by the experience of his own kindness to me, that I am faithful to my engagements.

"On the arrival of considerable funds which I expect from Martinique, where my supplies have been sold, I will repay to the treasury both capital and interest.

"It will not be until after a calculation, impossible now, which will place before the eyes of the minister my real losses, that I shall invoke the justice of your Majesty for their reimbursement; but it is in the light of a favour that I ask for the present loan of 400,000 livres, which the havoc in this cruise renders indispensable to prevent the destruction of one of the most faithful of your Majesty's subjects, whose ruin would bring on a general discouragement.*

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

At the same time Beaumarchais got his second in command decorated with the cross of St. Louis, and procured the admission into the military marine of one of his officers, who was afterwards an admiral.

Soon afterwards the Count d'Estaing, who had given such a glorious account of the vessel belonging to the author of "The Barber," returned to France.

* Beaumarchais received this advance of 400,000 livres as an instalment upon an indemnity of a more considerable amount, of which the figure had yet to be decided. It was fixed by three *fermiers-généraux* appointed by the minister. The ten vessels convoyed by the "Fier Roderigue" had been dispersed, and the greater part of them taken by the English, so that the losses of Beaumarchais in this voyage were enormous, and, after many discussions, the indemnity was fixed at two millions, payable in several instalments, which he received in succession, and the last of which was paid him, as we shall see, on his leaving the prison of Saint-Lazare.

Beaumarchais hastened to present his respects to him; the admiral was absent, and to excuse his absence wrote to the owner of the "Fier Roderigue" this facetious letter:—

"For a vice-admiral who is perhaps out of favour, having taken too much upon himself, having used, *abused even the naval forces* of M. de Beaumarchais, not to receive the visit of his *sovereign*, is what was never heard of; it is much against my will that it has been so. The excessive kindness with which the aquatic Jeannot had been honoured the evening before, by a number of unexpected visits, had made him close his door, without foreseeing one which would have caused him so much pleasure.

"M. d'Estaing begs M. de Beaumarchais to receive his excuses and his regrets; they are the greater from the fact that he is obliged to go limping about Versailles for some days. The surgeons assure him, that in virtue of staircases and bows, he will come back disabled for at least three weeks. If it be not so, he will request a meeting at Paris; otherwise he will try to procure, by means of a letter, a visit which is of so much interest to him.

"Passy, December 26, 1779."

To this Beaumarchais replied immediately in the same tone:—

"December 27, 1779.

"Very worthy and much respected Admiral, who may be attacked but can never be out of favour—as you have only made use of the navy belonging to me a sovereign, in the service of another who is equally powerful and just—let us hope he will do justice to us both, in loading you with honours and in repairing my losses.

"You shall receive, whenever you please, homage from

me, a sovereign and your servant, who did not wait for your great exploits to appreciate you, and who have fought a hundred times with my tongue against the army of scoundrels who were speaking ill of you, whilst you were using your sword so nobly against the enemies of the state. The first thing necessary is to re-establish your health, of which we have great need; and if by chance you have formed the project of writing an explanation of your warlike conduct, as people seek to insinuate, I entreat you to reject this idea with the sign of the cross, as a temptation of the devil's. I conjure you to do so, and do so in the name of all who honour you, and especially in that of a celebrated old man, who loves you, and who burns to see you seated by his side, with a bâton in your hand, at the great tribunal of honour, of which you so gloriously fulfil the duties.*

"I take the liberty, in order that you may keep away spleen, of forwarding to you my last political production, which has not had the good luck of pleasing everybody. When you can grant me a quarter of an hour; you may be quite sure of overwhelming with joy him who is, with the most respectful devotion, at the end, as at the beginning, and during the whole course of his life, worthy and respected Admiral,

"Your very humble servant,

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

The little work which Beaumarchais sent to the Admiral d'Estaing, to "keep away spleen," was a very serious one, which was about to procure him both glory and trouble. Whilst exchanging cannon shots, England and France also exchanged manifestoes.

* This, no doubt, refers to M. de Maurepas, who wished Admiral d'Estaing to be silent in reference to the criticisms of which his cruise had been the subject.

The court of London had employed the pen of the historian Gibbon to announce to the whole world the perfidy of the cabinet of Versailles. Forgetting its own history, which was full of diplomatic artifices of the same description, and much graver ones, the English government exaggerated and misrepresented the very small part that the court of France had taken in sending supplies to the Americans before the rupture between the two governments. Beaumarchais, who had just figured in the struggle with his cannon shots, thought he ought to interfere in it with his pen. He was in some measure authorized in doing so, for the justificatory address from the court of London, while reproaching the French minister with having protected a commercial company directed by Beaumarchais, attacked the latter personally in a very warm manner. In asking the minister permission to reply in his own name, Beaumarchais wrote, "If it will be without importance as coming from a private person, it will not, perhaps, be without force as coming from a person who has been insulted." He obtained this permission, and in December, 1779, published, under the title of "Observations upon the Justificatory Address from the Court of London," a pamphlet, which has been inserted in the collection of his works, and of which, consequently, we will speak but little. This pamphlet, written with his characteristic *verve*, which, with some negligences of

style, is always animated, made a rather great sensation. He placed in his turn, in the strongest light, all the ancient perfidiousness of the English government — all the annoyances to which it had subjected our commerce for three years, the patience with which the French government had borne them, and even how it had contributed to them more than once to please Lord Stormont. Unfortunately the author, drawn on by the vivacity of his pen, had committed a serious error: in dwelling upon the humiliating conditions of the treaty imposed by England in 1763, after the seven years' war, he had accepted, without verification, a very widely spread opinion, that there existed in this treaty a secret article, by which France shamefully granted to England the right *to limit the number of her vessels;* and, under the impression of this fact, which Beaumarchais believed true, he wrote the following lines:— "My courage revived when I thought that my country would be avenged for the degradation to which its enemy had subjected her, in fixing by the treaty of 1763 the small number of vessels which it condescended still to allow her."

On reading this phrase, the Duke de Choiseul and all the old ministers of Louis XV. who had signed the fatal treaty of 1763, and who felt themselves already sufficiently humiliated by the actual clauses of this treaty, eagerly had recourse to

the king, invoking justice against a writer, who sought to dishonour them; they demanded that the pamphlet of Beaumarchais should be suppressed by an order in council, as false and calumnious. The assertion of Beaumarchais had been made in good faith, it had even been published before by French and English writers. He proposed a correction of the statement: the Duke de Choiseul insisted upon a suppression in due form. The council of ministers met, and it was under these circumstances that the author of the pamphlet addressed to all the assembled ministers an unpublished letter, which appears to me sufficiently original in tone to deserve reproduction:

"December 19, 1779.

"My Lords,—If a warrior who fights for his country ought not to receive from it a degrading blow, because the inequality of the ground may have made him stumble an instant, is it justice in the king to class among the list of scandalous libellers, whose works are suppressed by decrees, a writer who repels with force and dignity the foul imputations of the enemies of his country, because he has fallen, with a hundred thousand others, into an involuntary error, which it would be easy, and even advantageous to correct with dignity?

"When a man who has aspired only to the honour of being in the right, does not blush to own his error publicly, and to extract from it a great advantage for the cause which he is defending, what inconvenience is there in letting him correct himself?

"What can have a better effect in counteracting a doubtful assertion, than the free and plain disavowal of it by its

author, when he can spread that as rapidly as the original work?

"And ought you to reserve for zeal, industry, and patriotism, the dishonour of suppression, intended to punish the voluntary misdeeds of rotten culprits and impenitent sinners?

"Before treating me with this cruelty, I implore the king's ministers to read what I am sending to the 'Courrier de l'Europe' and to the 'Nord.' The same thing in substance will be put at the same time in all the public papers, with a promise to those who will remit to me the faulty copy, to give them in place two corrected ones.

"I entreat them also to consider, that to throw discredit on such a production by the stigma of a seizure, is to take from it all that it contains of good and praiseworthy, and to give to the reproach of perfidy contained in the English manifesto the greatest force, by the disavowal of the principal points in the answer.

"From the grief which I feel beforehand, I feel that I cannot support the odious effect of such a thing. My head is leaving me, and I have passed a most dreadful night.

"I have received this instant from a relation of M. de Choiseul's, a copy annotated on the margin in his own hand, and with these words at page 35: '*This fact is false and absurd.*' These are exactly the terms in your proposed arrêt. It is he, then, who has dictated them!

"*False!* the expression is just, since the fact is not true; but *absurd!* After Dunkerque and its English commissioner, dare they, without lowering their eyes, characterise as absurd, any naval fact which concerns us, however hard it may be?

"To destroy a port of France at ten leagues from the enemy by their order, and to keep it in ruins under the shameful inspection of their commissioner, is truly *absurd.* Yet this has been the case for the last hundred years beneath the eyes of an indignant country.

"I speak to French hearts, I ought to be heard. Ah! leave me, my lords, leave me, I conjure you, to retrieve my error. I can do it, honourably, and with advantage; but, I feel sure, from what I suffer, that I shall die of grief, if you have the cruelty to deliver my person and my work to the degradation of a public stigma.

"It will only remain for my friends to print the twelve or fifteen hundred flattering letters that I have received during the last six days, in which the hearts of good citizens are plainly shown in the vivacity of their thanks:

"In which one says, 'I shall put this production in a separate case, with Tacitus, the Cardinal de Retz, Price, and Sidney, for no monument so noble, so worthy of the nation, will honour present events:'

"In which another writes, 'The author is intoxicated with patriotism, his pen sparkles. It is then true that man only does grand things when he is animated by noble passions:'

"In which a third owns, 'that he had never understood the question well, and that till I wrote, everybody said France was wrong, but that now opinions are settled:'

"In which all the writers thank me for my zeal and courage, in a country where so few people care to show it, for the glory of France. These letters of my fellow-citizens would show that such a waywardness is attached to my fate, that I can never undertake any good without its bringing me harm. He has wished, they will say, to work, to arm his country—they have stopped his expeditions; he has wished to write, to defend the honour of France—they have suppressed his works. His nation esteemed him, and authority crushed him. He had no choice then but to die or flee. From mercy, from humanity, if I cannot obtain it by justice, do not break my heart by a suppression, while you tolerate a Linguet. He has insulted you all, I have respected you all; he has made an attack upon you, I have only made

observations. What a difference in the work and in the reward!

"If this horrible order is hurled at me, I shall look upon myself as a limb cut off, dead, and no longer belonging to anything; and will owe nothing more to France, but extreme unction or a passport.

"I ask pardon, but I am in despair.

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

The passage which had wounded the Duke de Choiseul was suppressed, but without any remark that could be mortifying to Beaumarchais, whose pamphlet re-appeared, with this corrected passage, which still told severely against the signers of the treaty of 1763: "My courage revives when I think that my country will be avenged for the degradation to which it was subjected by the treaty of 1763; *that the dark veil, the funeral crape with which our port of Dunkerque has been enveloped these sixty years, will at length be rent.*"

Meanwhile Beaumarchais, whether warring with the cannon or the pen, had still to wait for payment for his supplies. During two years and a half the Congress had determined to consider him as a man who was too happy to send to them gratuitously. It had only replied to his claims by the most disdainful silence, when on a lucky day he received the following letter, which, taken in connection with the celebrated letter of Admiral d'Estaing, which we

have previously cited, adds another strange incident to his career.

"*By Express Order of the Congress sitting at Philadelphia, to M. de Beaumarchais.*

"Sir,—The Congress of the United States of America, grateful for the great efforts you have made in their favour, presents you its thanks, and the assurance of its esteem. *It grieves for the misfortunes you have suffered in support of its States.* Unfortunate circumstances have prevented the accomplishment of its desires; but it will take the promptest measures for acquitting itself of the debts it has contracted with you.

"The generous sentiments and the exalted views which alone could dictate a conduct such as yours, are your greatest eulogium, and are an honour to your character. Whilst by your great talents you have rendered yourself useful to your prince, you have gained the esteem of this rising Republic, and merited the deserved applause of the New World.

"JOHN JAY, President."

After two years and a half spent in the service of America, Beaumarchais found the Congress at last giving him some sign of its existence; this missive promised much: we shall show presently what it produced; but we must first explain how the Congress had been led to bestow upon the author of "The Barber of Seville," the applause of the New World, as an instalment towards the payment of his supplies.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE AMERICAN COMMISSIONERS.—BILLS AT A LONG DATE.—PROLONGED DELAYS.—BEAUMARCHAIS' FIRST MILLION. — ARBITRATION PROPOSED. — BEAUMARCHAIS IN DISTRESS.—REPUDIATION PERSISTED IN.—ULTIMATE COMPROMISE.

THE treaty of alliance between France and the United States had been signed the 6th February, 1778, at Versailles; and a short time after, Silas Deane, who was the first of the three American commissioners, to arrive at Paris, and who had treated with Beaumarchais in the name of the Congress, was recalled to Philadelphia, to render an account of his conduct, and to defend the engagements he had made from the imputations of his colleague, Arthur Lee. It is known that the latter had accused him of having, by a fraudulent agreement with Beaumarchais, and contrary to the intentions of the French government, transformed a gratuitous gift into a commercial operation. As this assertion, of which we have already shown the falsity, offered the advantage to America of dispensing with all gratitude, and all payment to

Beaumarchais, Congress was naturally somewhat disposed to adopt it. Silas Deane, who, on arriving in the United States, found an unfavourable impression against him, had to sustain a violent dispute with two brothers of Arthur Lee, who exercised considerable influence with Congress. Debates arose of a somewhat unedifying character, not only about the engagements contracted with Beaumarchais, but about the employment of the funds supplied directly to the American agents by the court of France. Meanwhile Silas Deane possessed the most honourable testimonials from the French government; the king, Louis XVI., had given him his portrait; M. de Vergennes had written the most flattering letters in his favour, and the late chief clerk of M. de Vergennes, M. Gérard, who arrived at the same time in Philadelphia, as Minister Plenipotentiary from the court of France, testified the greatest esteem for him. M. Gérard had been instructed to interfere, but with great prudence, in any disputes; but seeing that this one was increasing to such an extent as to become a contest between the French influence and the English party, represented in the heart of the Congress by the brothers Lee, he energetically undertook the offensive against the latter. "The stories of Mr. Arthur Lee," he wrote to M. de Vergennes, "are but an absurd tissue of falsehoods and sarcasms, which can only compromise those who have

the misfortune of being obliged to have any correspondence with him. Permit me, Monseigneur, to congratulate myself at least on having relieved you of this burden."* In another despatch M. Gérard wrote to the minister, "I explained myself gradually, and not until the very instant, when it was indispensable, to prevent this dangerous and bad man (Arthur Lee) from replacing Franklin,† and being at the same time charged with the negotiations with Spain. I cannot conceal from you, Monseigneur, that I rejoice every day more and more at having been able to assist in preventing this misfortune."

As to the accusations directed against Silas Deane, M. Gérard attributed them to the "spirit of ostracism, which," said he, "has already begun to exercise its influence against men who have rendered important services, when they have ceased to be necessary." Notwithstanding the support of M. Gérard, Silas Deane obtained indeed but half a victory. He was cleared from every accusation, and they allowed him for his personal expenses £500 a year, for the time his mission in France had lasted; but no men-

* After this quarrel, it was, indeed, decided that Arthur Lee, in his turn, should be recalled.

† Arthur Lee exerted all his strength to have Franklin also recalled, that he might remain the sole representative of the United States at the Court of France, but the French government, which mistrusted him, opposed this, and requested that Franklin might remain, and he alone was retained.

tion was made of his services. They decided that he should return to Europe, to arrange all his affairs, but without any official title. "It is an ostracism," M. Gérard wrote again to M. de Vergennes,—"it is an ostracism of the most cruel and deliberate character. They do not think of answering the letters you have written in his favour."

On his side Silas Deane wrote to Beaumarchais: "I have been treated in a manner which neither you, my friends, nor even my enemies expected. However, I do not doubt that America will end by becoming more just towards you and towards me."* The Congress, indeed, began not to have so much confidence in the reports of Arthur Lee. It moreover was divided between its desire not to pay for the old supplies and its wish to receive fresh ones. Accordingly Beaumarchais' agent, Francy, declared that his patron would not send anything more unless they acknowledged his previous claims, and guaranteed him, by a formal contract, from all difficulty for the future. The contract which was to satisfy this last condition had been signed the 6th April, 1778, by the members of the committee of commerce

* See Appendix, No. 14, a letter addressed to Beaumarchais by M. Carmichael, who was afterwards minister of the United States at the Court of Spain. This letter proves the friendship of Carmichael for Beaumarchais, and his conviction of the ingratitude of Congress towards him.

and Francy, acting in the name of Beaumarchais. Only the Congress, always distrustful, ordered that the contract should be sent to Paris, and should not be ratified until after the American deputation had obtained from the Minister of Foreign Affairs a categorical answer to the question, whether Beaumarchais was really the creditor of the Congress for cargoes to the amount of five millions already sent, or, whether these cargoes were, as Arthur Lee had not ceased to affirm, a gratuitous gift on the part of the French government. A note to this effect was presented to M. de Vergennes the 10th September, 1778, by the three commissioners, Franklin, Arthur Lee, who was not yet recalled, and John Adams, who had been lately sent to Paris to replace Silas Deane. Here is the answer of the minister: it is addressed to M. Gérard, the representative of France in the United States, who was commissioned to transmit it to the Congress.

"The Commissioners of the Congress have just addressed to me an official letter, which refers to two objects: the first relates to the correctness of the account of M. de Beaumarchais, under the name of the firm 'Roderigue Hortalez & Company;' the second, to the ratification of the contract, which the Congress, or rather the Committee of Commerce, in its name, has signed with Monsieur Théveneau de Francy, agent of Monsieur Caron de Beaumarchais. M. Franklin and his colleagues desire to know the articles that have been supplied to them by the king, and those that M. de Beaumarchais has supplied them with on his own account; and

they insinuate that the Congress is convinced that all, or at least the greater part of what has been sent, is on account of his Majesty. I have replied to them, that the king did not furnish them with anything; that he simply allowed M. de Beaumarchais to supply himself from his arsenals, under an engagement to replace what he took; and, moreover, that I would with pleasure interest myself to prevent their being too much pressed for the repayment of the military articles."

As to what related to the fresh contract signed between Beaumarchais and the Congress, the minister added, that he had no advice to give as to the ratification of this agreement, not being called on to answer for the engagements of the house of Rodrigue Hortalez & Co. In this answer of M. de Vergennes', which was very explicit concerning the rights of Beaumarchais as creditor of the Congress, there were two points; there was a suppression dictated by policy, and which consisted in passing over in silence the pecuniary aid granted to Beaumarchais before the rupture between France and England: and, at the same time, the truth which was allowed to appear in the minister's last sentence in reference to the military articles supplied. This sentence proves that, if Beaumarchais had received pecuniary aid, he had not had it to enable him to send gratuitously, but to send on credit, leaving to the debtors rather a considerable latitude, especially as to the munitions of war. Besides, it is evident

that Beaumarchais conformed to ministerial instructions; for during two years, excepting two cargoes of 150,000 francs each, of which he had been obliged to take possession by authority, he had not been able to obtain a liard for five millions of military and other stores, and when he applied for payment on account, the Americans replied to him by denying the debt, or did not reply at all.

In presence of the formal declaration of the minister, reproduced and corroborated in a note addressed to the Congress by M. Gérard, in which it was said that "the French government has nothing to do with the commercial operations of Beaumarchais," it was necessary that Congress should at last make up its mind to acknowledge the author of "The Barber of Seville" as a genuine creditor. It was not until then that they sent him the flattering address we have quoted in the preceding chapter. On reading these words, "The Congress grieves for the misfortunes you have suffered in support of its States; it will take the promptest measures for acquitting itself of the debt it has contracted with you," Beaumarchais thought himself, at last, on the eve of receiving either money or tobacco: this was another illusion. Instead of giving him an instalment, at least in kind, the Congress, alleging the bad state of its finances and the *dangers of navigation* as pretexts, preferred sending him, in October, 1779, on his general account,

2,544,000 livres in bills of exchange at three years' date, drawn on Franklin. It is certain that Congress used freely the privilege M. de Vergennes had conferred on it, of taking its time with Beaumarchais, when, upon a debt of five millions of three years' date, it sent an instalment in bills of exchange payable in three years more—bills which were signed by a nation hardly acknowledged as such, and which consequently could scarcely pass for ready money.

Notwithstanding the pompous thanks of the Congress, its conduct exhibited an afterthought; it persisted in reality in not believing seriously in Beaumarchais' debt, and it did not despair of finding some means of getting rid of it. We are quite astonished, two years later, to find the minister of finance, Robert Morris, speaking to Franklin of a plan for not paying these bills, and Franklin proving to him that his scheme is impracticable, because the bills are at the time in circulation. We are not less astonished when we find Franklin—in answer to a question addressed to him by the head of the financial department of foreign affairs, M. Durival, in reference to a settlement for the many millions which his country had received from France, and of which we will speak hereafter—return to a question which appeared decided, and three years after the declaration by M. de Vergennes, two years after the letter from the Congress and the issue of the bills of exchange,

ask the minister again, the 15th of May, 1781, if the things claimed by Beaumarchais were not gifts from the King of France. M. Durival answered him very laconically on this subject: "As to the articles furnished and advanced by M. de Beaumarchais, the minister has no knowledge of them."

In the meanwhile, Beaumarchais, discontented at being so badly paid by the General Congress, had endeavoured to treat with the separate States of America. He was not more fortunate. Two cargoes sold by him—one to the State of Virginia, the other to the State of South Carolina—had been paid for in paper-money, and this paper, before he could get rid of it, had suffered an enormous depreciation. All this was not encouraging; accordingly, in the year 1780, he on his part refused to ratify the treaty concluded in his name with the Congress by Francy. Making as much as possible out of the bills of exchange at three years' date, he speculated no more with the constituted bodies, and confined himself to waiting till the Congress came to a final settlement about his general account.

In 1781, Silas Deane returned to France to examine all the accounts he had left unsettled; that of Beaumarchais was fixed by him, April 6, at a sum of 3,600,000 livres, after the deduction of the payments made on account, and including the interest from the reception of the first supplies.

Armed with this claim, Beaumarchais demanded payment from the Congress. No answer came during two years. In 1783, a new agent from the United States, Mr. Barclay, arrived in Paris, with the title of consul-general, and a mission to revise the accounts audited by Silas Deane. Beaumarchais refused to submit his account, which had been already verified, to a fresh examination. Mr. Barclay declared to him that the Congress would neither hear nor pay anything unless his account was again gone over and investigated. After resisting for a year, Beaumarchais yielded. The account was revised, and reduced in amount, by Mr. Barclay; but the American Government persisted in not paying anything, and soon, an incident which occurred without the knowledge of Beaumarchais determined the Congress to adjourn his debt indefinitely. This incident was as follows.

The United States having already received a great deal of money from the French Government, and requesting, in 1783, a new loan of six millions, it was agreed that, on receiving these six millions, they should determine their financial position with France by an exact recapitulation in the contract of all the sums they had already received, whether as loans or gifts. In the first class, under the head of sums lent successively, eighteen millions were put down to begin with; then came a loan of ten millions from Holland, guaranteed by the King of France, and of which he paid

the interest; finally, the six millions of the last loan. All this made a sum of *thirty-four millions*, which the United States engaged to repay at different times, and which, by the way, was not paid very exactly at the proper periods. At length, the generosity of the King caused the insertion in the contract of a second category of sums, which he declared he made a present of to the United States. This list consisted—first, of three millions *granted*, the contract said, previously to the treaty of alliance of February, 1778; secondly, of six millions given in 1781. Here, then, were nine millions which the King of France, independently of sums lent and of enormous sums spent in the American war, declared he gave up gratuitously. Now, by a rather strange oversight, Franklin, who had signed this contract the 25th February, 1783, did not perceive till three years later, in 1786, when he had already returned to America, that there was an explanation to be asked for respecting the three millions indicated as having been *given* previously to 1778. He had received from the Government but two millions, but he had received in 1777 a million more from the *fermiers-généraux*, for which million the United States had paid an instalment in tobacco to the value of 153,229 livres. "It is possible," wrote Franklin, to the banker of the United States, at Paris, "that this million, furnished ostensibly by the *fermiers-généraux*, may have been in reality a

gift from the Crown; but in this case, as Mr. Thompson observes, the *fermiers-généraux* owe us the two cargoes of tobacco which they received on account of that sum." There is some *naïveté* in Franklin omitting to add that, if the million in question was not the one given by the *fermiers-généraux*, the United States must have owed them for nine years the difference between the million received in 1777 and the 153,229 livres paid in tobacco. It must be said that the United States, a young and poor nation, were sufficiently accustomed to receive from all hands, and more disposed to accept than to return.* The banker of the United States, M. Grand, was commissioned then to ascertain from M. de Vergennes, if among the three millions which the King said he had granted gratuitously to the United States, was included the million from the *fermiers-généraux*. M. Durival answered, in the name of M. de Vergennes, that the King had nothing to do with the advance made by the *fermiers-généraux*, but that the sum in question was a *million delivered from the royal treasury, June* 10, 1776. It was precisely the million given secretly to Beaumarchais. Now, what had been

* Our Chargé d'Affaires at Philadelphia, M. de Marbois, writes to M. de Vergennes, August 24, 1784:—"I have reason to think that the avarice of M. M. (the Minister of Finance of the United States) may render him capable of very reprehensible irregularities, and that he will never take much trouble about fulfilling the obligations of the United States."

the idea of the Government in inserting in the contract of February 25, 1783, any mention of this million, after the eight millions given directly to the American agents? Was it a simple recapitulation of the money disbursed gratuitously in the service of the United States, a recapitulation made in order to facilitate the regulation of the accounts of the treasury, without any thought being given to the inconvenient effects it might have upon Beaumarchais? If this last supposition were the true one, it must be acknowledged that Beaumarchais, in claiming full payment for all his cargoes, and accounting for the money afterwards, would have acted contrarily to the views of the Government which had supplied him with funds; but what took place after M. Durival's answer gives us a right to affirm more than ever that the Government, in making the advance, did not mean that Beaumarchais should be accountable for the million to the United States.

Indeed, after reading the letter from M. Durival, which stated that this million was given June 10, 1776, without any further detail, the banker of the United States, M. Grand, wrote to obtain the receipt, and the name of the person who had received the million. The chief of the office of funds consulted M. de Vergennes, and replied at first by a refusal. The banker insisted afresh, alleging his own responsibility. M. Durival then addressed to the minister a secret

report as to the question whether it was desirable to supply M. Grand with the copy he asked for, of M. de Beaumarchais' receipt. After having stated that, according to the receipt, M. de Beaumarchais was to render an account to M. de Vergennes only, the chief of the bureau of funds concluded thus: "There might be an objection to furnishing a weapon against M. de Beaumarchais by showing to M. Grand the copy he asks for, of the acknowledgment for the million delivered June 10, 1776." In the margin of the report there is written: "Referred, September 5, 1786;" and below, in the margin also, is found the decision of M. de Vergennes thus expressed: "There can be no reason for giving the acknowledgment mentioned in this report." Conformably to this decision of the minister's, the chief of the bureau of funds replied to the banker of the United States by the following letter:—

"Versailles, September 16, 1786.

"The minister persists, Sir, in his opinion that the receipt which you ask for has nothing in common with the affairs with which you are charged, and that it would be useless in the new point of view in which you look at it. It is very easy for you, Sir, to prove that the sum in question has not been paid into your hands, since you did not begin to be intrusted with the affairs of the Congress until January, 1777, whilst the receipt in question is dated June 10, 1776.

"I have the honour to be, &c.

"DURIVAL."

By this refusal of the minister the Congress be-

lieved itself sufficiently authorised to conclude—first, that it was Beaumarchais who had received this million; secondly, that this million ought to be restored by him to the Congress; thirdly, that the Congress ought not to pay anything until this mystery was cleared up. All these conclusions were not equally just, for there was no question here, as in the declaration of the minister in 1778, of a concealment dictated by policy; the French government no longer concealed the fact, in 1786, that it had assisted the insurgent colonies before their rupture with England, for it declared formally that it had given three millions with that view before the treaty of 1778, and went even so far as to fix the date of the first million delivered June 10, 1776. If it refused to unveil to the United States the name of the man to whom it had advanced this million, it was no longer from considerations of political prudence, but from a motive of personal equity towards Beaumarchais, "not to furnish the Americans with a weapon against him," as M. Durival plainly stated in his report to the minister. By this refusal to communicate to the United States Beaumarchais' receipt, the minister said to them explicitly, "I have classed this first million in the contract of February 25, 1783, amongst the millions given gratuitously by me for your service, because it was in fact given by me; but as it has not been given to you, as the man to whom I gave it

has bound himself by his receipt to render an account of its employment to me, and not to you, this man can be accountable to me alone. If I asked you for the repayment of this million, you would on your part have the right to claim it from the person who received it; but, as I ask you for nothing, it is for me only to decide how far this gratuitous advance of a million made by me on your behalf is to be serviceable to you, or to the man to whom I made it, in order to forward a secret operation which has been very serviceable to you, but which hitherto, from your refusal to pay, and from the various losses he has suffered in his trade with you, appears to have been more injurious than profitable to him."

This suppression in favour of Beaumarchais was the more justifiable, from the fact that the incident took place completely without his knowledge; that he had not been called on to substantiate his rights or interests, either upon mention being made in the contract of February 25, 1783, of the million received by him—a secret contract which he did not know of—nor upon the question of the receipt which was applied for by the banker of the United States in 1786, and refused by the minister.*

* To the preceding it must further be added, that whatever motive may have determined M. de Vergennes to speak, in the contract of February 25, 1783, of the first million given secretly to Beaumarchais, the minister had certainly no intention of making him responsible towards the United States for what he had received in order to assist

Whilst these explanations were being exchanged between M. de Vergennes and the banker of the United States, Beaumarchais urged in vain upon the Congress the liquidation of his account, which had been deferred nine years, asking at least for an arbitration, proposing as one of his arbitrators M. de Vergennes himself, and accepting, on the part of the Americans, any arbitrators they chose to appoint, with the exception of his personal enemy Arthur Lee.

In 1787, his patience being exhausted, he wrote to the President of the Congress, under date of June 12, an unpublished letter, from which I extract the following passage:—

"What do you expect, Sir, is to be thought here of the vicious circle in which, it appears, I am to be inclosed? We will not make any payment to M. de Beaumarchais before we have arranged his accounts, and we will not arrange his accounts that we may not have any payment to make him! A people who have become powerful and independent may well, it will be said, look upon gratitude as the virtue of an individual, and quite beneath its policy; but nothing can liberate a State from being just, and above all from paying its debts. I dare hope, Sir, that, touched by the importance of the affair, and by the force of my reasons, you will do me the favour of honouring me with an official answer as to the course which the honourable Congress will

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them; for, in the contract of February 25, M. de Vergennes does not say a word either of the second million given by Spain, or of the third million given by instalments to Beaumarchais in 1777.

determine upon—whether to verify my account quickly, and pay on that verification like any just sovereign, or at length to appoint arbitrators in Europe to decide the points in debate as to assurance and commission, as Mr. Barclay had the honour to propose to you himself in 1785; or, finally, to write to me, without equivocation, that the sovereigns of America, forgetting my past services, refuse me all justice. Then I will adopt the course most suitable to my despised interests, to my wounded honour, without failing in the profound respect with which I am, both of the general Congress and of yourself, Monsieur le President, the very humble, &c.

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

The Congress thought this letter rather bold, and, to teach their creditor to behave himself, they confided the examination of his debt to the sole man whom Beaumarchais had excluded from it—to Arthur Lee. The account was soon arranged. Arthur Lee pretended to discover that the contractor, to whom the Congress had, in 1779, sent such fine protestations of gratitude, and whose debt had been settled in 1781 at 3,600,000 livres, had not only nothing to claim from the United States, but on the contrary owed the United States 1,800,000 francs. After four years of protestations on the part of Beaumarchais, Congress, in 1793, intrusted a fresh examination of this debt to one of the most distinguished statesmen of America, Mr. Alexander Hamilton, who, remodelling the fabulous account of Arthur Lee, made Beaumarchais pass from the position of a debtor to the

amount of 1,800,000 francs to that of a legitimate creditor of the Congress, for the sum of *two millions two hundred and eighty thousand francs.* There were, it will be seen, but four millions difference between the calculations of Arthur Lee and those of Mr. Hamilton; but at the same time Hamilton proposed that payment should be deferred until fresh endeavours had been made with the French government to obtain a communication respecting the mysterious receipt of one million refused seven years previously, considering that if this receipt was signed by Beaumarchais, there was a reason for deducting one million from his claim. Conformably to the instructions of the Congress, the minister of the United States to the French Republic, Governor Morris, in a letter under date of June 24, 1794, applied for this receipt to Buchot, then minister for foreign affairs. Buchot, without regard to the official declarations and to the refusals of his predecessors, wishing, he said, to give the United States the satisfaction which had been refused them by the ministers of the old *régime*, gave up to a foreign government a claim against an individual who, according to the terms of this claim, was only accountable towards the French government.

From this moment Beaumarchais' debt underwent a new series of difficulties. The Congress said to him: "In a contract signed between us and the

French government, February 25, 1783, this government declares that it has given us, gratuitously, nine millions. We have received but eight; it is you who have received the ninth! Prove to us that this million, received by you June 10, 1776, is not that which was destined for us, otherwise we will deduct it from your debt."

Beaumarchais replied to the Congress: "I demand that due notice be taken of the most explicit declaration which I now make, that I have never received from King Louis XVI., from his ministers, or from any person in the world, *either a million, or a single shilling, to be presented to you as a gift;* and that all the money I employed in your service as a zealous friend, as an honourable merchant, and simply in fair trading, was collected by me, either in France or in other States of Europe, in the way of loan or for investment; that all my creditors, less patient towards me than I have been towards you, have not let twenty years pass without requiring their account and its discharge, and if *there are still some to pay—a question which is foreign to you in your position as debtors*—it would be but an obligation the more to put me in a state to do so, by paying me yourselves. As to the contract of 1783, the existence of which you inform me of, and of which I had always been in ignorance, I declare that this contract, in which I was not invited to take part, either by you or the

ministers of France, is absolutely foreign to me, under whatever point of view it be examined; for the simple reason, that I took no part in it, which was indispensable, if after ten years you were to endeavour to make it a reason for eluding or putting off my payment, after having exhausted all others."*

Such was the interminable dispute in which Beaumarchais consumed the latter years of his life. At this period of the suit his fate was a very gloomy one. He was proscribed, had taken refuge in Hamburg, and believed himself ruined in France; he saw for his only daughter no other resource for the future than this American debt, and clung to it with all the energy of despair. From his garret at Hamburg he addressed volumes to the Congress, to the ministers of the United States, and even *to the whole American nation.* One of these unpublished Memoirs, written with a heavy and fatigued hand, struck me from its peroration, in which, through the heaviness of old age, we still see something of the *verve,* rather unequal, but highly coloured, of the Beaumarchais of a former day.

"Americans," says the old man, "I have served you with unwearied zeal; I have received during my life nothing but bitterness for my recompense, and I die your creditor. Suffer me, then, in dying to bequeath to you my daughter, to

* Extracted from an unpublished Memorial of Beaumarchais, of the 10th April, 1795.

endow with a portion of what you owe me. Perhaps, after me, through the injustice of other persons, from which I shall no longer be able to defend myself, there will remain nothing in the world for her; and perhaps Providence has wished to procure for her, through your delay in paying me, a resource after my death against complete misfortune. Adopt her as a worthy child of the State! Her mother, equally unhappy, and my widow, her mother will conduct her to you. Let her be looked upon amongst you as the daughter of a citizen. But if after this last effort, after all I have just said, contrary to all that seems possible, I could fear you would again reject my petition; if I could fear that to me or to my heirs you would refuse arbitrators, desperate, ruined as I am, as much through Europe as through you, and as your country is the only one where I can, without shame, extend my hand to the inhabitants, what remains for me to do except to supplicate Heaven to restore me for a short time to health, so as to permit me to travel to America. Arrived in the midst of you, with mind and body weakened, unable to maintain my rights, would it be necessary then, that, with my proofs in my hand, I should be carried on a stool to the entrance of your national assemblies; and that, holding out to all the cap of liberty, with which no man has helped more than myself to decorate your heads, that I should exclaim to you, 'Americans, bestow alms on your friend, whose accumulated services have received but this reward. *Date obolum Belisario!*'

"PIERRE-AUGUSTIN CARON BEAUMARCHAIS.

"Near Hamburg, April 10, 1795."

The Congress remained deaf to the claims of its contractor; not only did they allow him to die without liquidating his debt, but during the thirty-six years which succeeded his death, from 1799 to 1835,

every successive government in France, and every ambassador from these governments to the United States, supported the claims of the heirs of Beaumarchais in vain. There was a settled opposition to this claim, which was religiously transmitted from one generation of legislators to another. Not only did they say, "We have to deduct from the debt, which was fixed in 1793, by Mr. Hamilton, at the sum of 2,280,000 livres, the sum of one million given for us to Beaumarchais, June 10, 1776," but they added: "As the interest of this million, of which we have had no account since 1776, absorbs the surplus, we are quits with the heirs of Beaumarchais, and will not pay them anything." On their side, the heirs of Beaumarchais replied to the Congress: "According to Beaumarchais' account, you owed, in 1793, interest included, not 2,280,000 livres, as Mr. Hamilton put it down, but more than four millions. Pay us at least the sum fixed by your own reporter." As to the million which the United States claimed to deduct, the French government, resting upon the official decla ations made to the Congress in 1778, by M. de Vergennes, interposed strongly in support of the heirs of Beaumarchais, and the first despatch addressed by the minister Talleyrand on this question, Germinal 28, Year xi, to our ambassador in the United States, will render it unnecessary for us to reproduce all the other despatches which were

written successively by other ministers to the same effect.

"They bring forward," wrote Talleyrand to the heirs of M. de Beaumarchais, "a receipt given by the latter, the 10th June, 1776, for one million remitted to him, by order of M. de Vergennes, and wish to reckon this sum in the supplies furnished by him to the United States. As the payment and destination of this million related to a measure of secret policy, ordered by the king, and forthwith executed, it appears neither just nor equitable to confound it with the mercantile operations, posterior in date, of a private individual with the Congress. Consequently, no conclusion against M. de Beaumarchais, as a personal creditor of the United States, can be drawn from the document communicated by the ex-commissioner for Foreign Affairs, Buchot, to the American minister.

"I invite you, citizen minister, to support by your influence the claims of the Beaumarchais family, and to dwell upon the considerations of national good faith and honour to which they appeal. A French citizen, who risked for the sake of the Americans his whole fortune, and whose zeal and activity were essentially useful during the war which obtained for them their liberty and their rank among nations, might without doubt aspire to some favour: at least he ought always to be heard, when he asks only for honesty and justice.

"Receive, &c.,

"TALLEYRAND."

In 1816, the government of the United States asked the Duke de Richelieu, who was then Minister of Foreign Affairs, through M. Galatin, if the French government would consent to declare formally that

the million, furnished June 10, 1776, to Beaumarchais, *had nothing in common with the supplies furnished by the said Beaumarchais to the United States.* The Duke de Richelieu, depending on the official note addressed to the Congress by M. Gérard, did not hesitate to make the declaration asked for. This was only correct in an official sense: but it seems to us that this should have been sufficient to terminate the dispute; for, indeed, admitting even that Beaumarchais had drawn all his money from the coffers of the State, there was certainly something strange and undignified in the attitude of a nation which had become powerful, and which, after receiving from an individual, at a period of extreme distress, most signal services, persisted in saying to this individual or his heirs, "Who gave you the money with which you assisted me so opportunely, and which you have claimed from me in vain so many years? I believe you received this money to make me a present of it. Your government has addressed to me on this subject, between 1778 and 1783, two declarations: one of which affirms positively that I ought to pay you for all your supplies; while the other leads me to think that it was intended to make me a present of one million out of these same supplies. Since this period, your government has declared, without intermission, that it has nothing to do with your commercial operations,

and that I ought to pay you the whole; but, as I suspect there is some cabinet mystery beneath this, I prefer to suppose that the assistance you supplied to me was to be considered gratuitous, and that I ought not to pay for it either to your government, which does not claim payment, or to you, who claim it with their sanction."

Such was evidently the situation in which the government of the United States was placed, by the formal declaration of the Duke of Richelieu in 1816. The government did not the less persist in disavowing the debt, and notwithstanding the favourable opinion of several eminent lawyers in America, notwithstanding the presence of the daughter of Beaumarchais, who in 1824 went, accompanied by one of her sons, to solicit the Congress in person, at each renewal of the debate there was found an inflexible majority to refuse the claim. It was not until 1835, when the famous affair of the twenty-five millions was brought forward for the second time, and when the rather violent proceedings of President Jackson had taught us that the American government was a less patient creditor than ourselves, that the idea arose of entering the claim of the heirs of Beaumarchais in the list of compensations claimed in the name of France; but the claim was singularly reduced. For thirty-six years the family of the author of "The Barber of Seville" claimed at least

the 2,280,000 francs which were allowed in the report of Mr. Hamilton in 1793; they had the choice given them in 1835, between *eight hundred thousand francs* or nothing; they preferred 800,000 francs, and this long and difficult suit between Beaumarchais and the United States was at length terminated, as so many suits are terminated, by a very unsatisfactory reckoning.

I have been anxious to relate these circumstances with entire impartiality. I think I have proved that the accusation made against Beaumarchais in America, of having deceived the French government by making it believe that he was sending supplies gratuitously to the Congress, while he demanded payment for them, is completely false.*

Admitting that the thing was possible, though it did not occur, it is evident from the letters of M. de Vergennes, from those of Beaumarchais, and from the explanations obtained at various times from the

* This accusation is, above all, developed in a work entitled "A Political and Civil History of the United States of America, from 1763 to 1797," by Timothy Pitkin. I have been unable to procure Mr. Pitkin's work in France, but I have read a very complete *résumé* of that part of the work which is devoted to Beaumarchais in a French journal published in the United States; I have in my possession all the documents submitted to the Congress at different periods on the subject of this affair; I have also consulted the "Memoirs of Arthur Lee," Beaumarchais' most inveterate adversary, who was the first to spread the theory adopted by M. Pitkin; I was accordingly well acquainted with the theory I had to refute.

minister on the part of the Congress, that from the commencement to the end of the transaction, M. de Vergennes was constantly acquainted with the claims of Beaumarchais, and that if he had disapproved of them, nothing would have been easier for him than to oppose them, even without sacrificing that secrecy which the transaction required, before the rupture with England, and still more so after that rupture. I have been obliged nevertheless, contrary to the very sincere opinion of the heirs of Beaumarchais, and, to the declarations of the different ministers since 1778, all based upon the first official declaration of M. de Vergennes—I have been obliged to re-establish the truth as to the fact of the celebrated million, which was incontestably given by the government, not for a *secret political service, unconnected with the American supplies,* but for the supplies themselves. Finding also in the archives of Foreign Affairs the material proof that Beaumarchais, independently of the first million, given June 10, 1767, received a second from the Court of Spain, August 11, 1776, and a third paid by instalments in the course of 1777, I have been obliged to mention all these facts because they are true, and because the first duty of a writer who respects himself, is not to conceal the truth.

Now, from these facts, can any induction unfavourable to Beaumarchais be drawn? I do not

think so. How can we admit, without clashing with all semblance of truth, that M. de Vergennes did not ask for any account of the employment of these three millions from an agent who bound himself formally to give him an account of the use he made of it in each of his receipts? The affair being one of those called *cabinet secrets*, it can be easily understood that the documents calculated to determine its character are rare. But it appears to us to result manifestly from the position taken by M. de Vergennes, in the disputes between the Congress and Beaumarchais, that the latter must have presented to the minister an account of his profits and losses. It was not difficult for him to prove that beyond his claim of four millions upon the Congress, of which he vainly endeavoured to procure payment, he had not only lost several vessels captured by the English cruisers, but that he had also suffered considerable losses in his transactions with the separate States of the Union; in the State of Virginia alone, upon the sudden depreciation of paper-money, he had experienced a loss which he estimated at *three millions*. "I am much grieved," wrote Jefferson, then Governor of Virginia, in a letter of the date of the 15th September, 1799—"I am much grieved that the unfortunate depreciation of paper-money should have enveloped in the general loss M. de Beaumarchais, who has deserved so well of us." It was easy then for Beaumarchais

to prove to M. de Vergennes, that the subvention received from France and Spain was much exceeded by his losses, and he must have done so, since M. de Vergennes permitted him to claim as a legitimate debt the sum which he demanded from the Congress; he must have done so, as we shall see at a later period; for, after having advanced him these three millions, the king and M. de Vergennes, to indemnify him for the loss of his flotilla after the battle of Grenada, granted him again, between 1784 and 1786, a private indemnification of *two millions*. Now is it not as clear as the day, that the same king and the same minister would not have granted an indemnity of *two millions* to a man who had not yet given an account of the use he had made of the three millions which had been secretly confided to him ten years previously, for an affair which had already been completely terminated eight years, above all, when this man had just had "The Marriage of Figaro" produced.

To sum up and conclude with this mysterious affair, which in fifty years caused more than fifty despatches to pass between France and America, not one of which was correct, Beaumarchais, without mentioning his claims against the private States of the Union, claimed in 1795, from the Congress, a sum of 4,141,171 livres, including the interest of the account gone over in 1781, by Silas Deane: *after forty years' discussion,* his heirs have received *eight*

hundred thousand francs. He lost then a greater sum than the secret subsidy of *three millions* which he received. This result was less absolutely injurious in itself than if the subvention had not been given, but it does not any the more do honour to the gratitude and generosity of the American government.

It was not, then, in his transactions with the Congress that Beaumarchais enriched himself; they were the sources of losses rather than benefits to him: but when the subsidies from France and Spain had enabled him to open a commercial house on a large scale, he followed this new career with all the ardour he exhibited in his lawsuits and comedies, and entered into a great variety of speculations. These attempts were in general less profitable than they might have been, if Beaumarchais had not retained in his character of speculator all the qualities and defects of the artist: he loved difficult enterprises, provided they were either brilliant or useful, and he embraced too many things at the same time.

I have before me a general catalogue of his affairs from the 1st of October, 1776, until the 30th September, 1783, that is to say, during the seven years which represent more particularly his commercial career. This catalogue shows that money passed through his hands to the amount of 21,044,191 livres in disbursements, and of 21,092,515 in receipts; the

surplus then of the receipts over the disbursements was only 48,327 livres. It is true, the expenditure relates to several enterprises which at a later period would bring in receipts; but the slight surplus of expenditure over receipts, during a period of seven years, is sufficient, it appears to me, to give us the idea of a merchant who was rather adventurous besides being most active and amusing. We have seen Beaumarchais hitherto mixing together commerce and politics: it will not perhaps be disagreeable to view him simply as a merchant, hurrying from one port to another, purchasing or constructing vessels, *curbing*, as he said, *his various captains, so as to obtain a little profit out of them*, and discussing naval expeditions with all the daring of a consummate privateer.

Amongst the five hundred letters which represent him under this aspect, I will quote but one. He is at Bordeaux superintending one of his armaments, and is writing to his agent Francy, who had returned from America, and was stopping at Paris.

"Bordeaux, October 19, 1782.

"Now, mon Francy, I know everything respecting my armament, but I should not have known anything if I had left before I had seen it. 'La Ménagère' will be thoroughly well commanded: Foligné (the name of the captain), in spite of some whims, is an excellent man; his staff is excellent, and his crew have the utmost good will! So much for the first. 'L'aimable Eugénie,' instead of being 600 tons

burden, is hardly 500. Her captain is an intractable man, self-willed and careless. Without telling me anything about it, they have put 32 cannons, 160 men, and all the necessary accompaniments on board; so that on its return this vessel, whose expenses are 9000 livres a month, and which has cost me at least 300,000 livres, can only involve a loss. They have only taken 1000 barrels of flour, making 125 tons; 105 thousand of *poudre au roi*, making scarcely 50 tons, my cargo, which does not come to so much—and the vessel is so fully laden, that they have left at Nantes the iron bands which I required for 'La Ménagère,' and which they have not found sufficient room for.

"To make this vessel sail, they have 76,000 useless bricks in her as ballast, instead of taking coals, which would have sold well at Saint Domingo. Besides this, they have thirty tons of iron in ballast, and their stowage was so badly made that they had to shift twenty-five tons of iron to prevent the vessel being thrown on her beam-ends in rough weather; but I have remedied as much as was in my power all these evils, by the nature of the instructions I have given to Levaigneur and father Poligné. So much for the second.

"'L'Alexandre' sails like a *basket without a bottom*, that is the expression of Gregory (another captain), but she keeps a more even keel than the 'Eugénie;' she arrives in the river to-morrow from Rochelle. She has nothing in her wood, but her tackle, sails, and masts are all destroyed. She fought (could you believe it?) in the sight of four French frigates, and of a vessel of 64 guns, who did not make the least movement to help her. When the captain complained of it at Rochefort, they told him he ought to have made signals. The captain replied, very justly, that the noise and the fire of the cannons were the best signals he could have made.

"He is going to stop at Souillac, without going up to Bor-

deaux, and I hope he will set off with the other two. He does not sail well enough to be sent alone anywhere. We must assist him, and I reckon upon having a freight from the king. Gregory himself is rather hot-headed; he will agree badly with Baudin (another captain), who is still more self-willed and despotic. I am going to curb them all, so that they may obey, and give me a little profit, for I expect but little from them, considering the price of commodities from Europe in the islands, the reduction in freightage, and the low price of commodities from the islands in Europe.

"Here, then, I am nailed, until they leave, in a place where I ought not to stay more than three weeks. Nothing would be done, I see, and everything would again go to the devil.

"How is your delicate health? How is your gentle and very amiable sister-in-law? Your project of travelling in hot climates, is only one of those ideas which invalids have and which reason restrains. Repose and diet are all that are necessary for you. Talk of my letter to my wife, so that she may be acquainted with everything. I have all my staff here, and more than I want to occupy all my time. I do not know whether I shall be able to write to her to-day.

"Tell Cantini* I have received his last letter with its contents. I beg him to send me a line by every post, whether I write to him or not. I can finish everything here in less than a fortnight, so there is now nearly an end to my journey. Good-bye, mon Francy."

Young Francy liked extravagance; he had made money by the interest Beaumarchais had given him in his speculations, and although he was living in the house of his patron, he kept three horses for

* It was his cashier, of whom he had later to complain, and who was replaced by the eldest brother of his friend Gudin.

himself. Beaumarchais had also a certain taste for show: but sometimes the accusations of Dr. Dubourg returned to his mind; he feared envious detractors, felt himself seized by starts with a great love of simplicity, and addressed to Francy, in the midst a of letter on business, attacks *ab irato* in the style of the following, which is also dated from Bordeaux:—

"Bordeaux, October 26, 1782.

". . . What I disapprove of is, that you keep three horses at Paris; in your position, this extravagance is an absurdity, and more than useless. You make everybody exclaim at me, exclaim at you, indeed at both of us. And at a time when I wish to retrench a portion of my expenses, I have the vexation of hearing it said, that I am surrounded by the greatest extravagance. Certainly I ought not to account any more than you for my conduct to any one; however, there is what is called a regard for position, and when we break through it, we have all the foolish and all the envious relations, enemies, great persons and small, against us. As you are in my house, I am annoyed that they can tell me that everything connected with me is in unrestrained extravagance. What the devil can you want with all this train? Come! live simply, and do away with what is useless. You are the cause of my not knowing any longer what takes place in my stables; I am robbed on every side, and this arises from the state of disorder by which they profit. Ten horses, with three coachmen, who combine to plunder me! I beg this of you as a favour; we are quite out of our places, my friend.* I am going to order the sale

* This was in Beaumarchais both full of good sense and delicacy.

of two mares, which belong to me; I shall have enough, even too many, with five, and do not be the cause of my inability to have order in my household. As soon as there is irregularity there is theft. What I ask of you is just and reasonable; I wish to live henceforth with the greatest simplicity. When you know from what high personages the censures which cause my remarks proceed, you will find I cannot take too many precautions against malignity; you would not wish to do me harm, and all this does. I speak to you from my heart, as one friend to another."

In spite of the gentle manner in which they were put, these observations were doubtless displeasing to Francy, who was proud, somewhat capricious in his capacity of patient, and who kept three horses at his expense; for in the letter we have just quoted, Beaumarchais, who though abroad he was always at war, in his home loved peace above everything, replied to him amicably: "No one understands me, or wishes to understand me. Well, do as you like; let us say no more about it, and attend to your health; that is the principal thing."

The health of the young man, who was suffering from a disease of the chest, was declining from day to day. He had gone to pass some time at Dunkirk with his friends. The author of "The Barber," in the midst of all his labours, found time to transform himself, for "his Francy," into a physician, and write a letter to him which seems to me full of kindness, from the delicate artifices that Beaumarchais

employs to induce his young friend to follow a rigorous treatment.

"Paris, August 26, 1783.

"My poor Francy,—You are silly to say that I forget you; but, as you are also sick, I pardon you. If you pay as much attention to your health as I do, you will get well quickly enough. Only, my friend, you must have no pity on yourself, and must do rigorously what I am going to prescribe to you. I have had two very important conferences with M. Seiffert, your physician. He did not approve of your being bled in the foot, although he did not wish to tell you so. He feared to agitate your mind, and went round the question; but he always speaks plainly to me, and this is what I have heard from him as the result of his theory, and of the successful manner in which he applied it to Madame de St. Alban, who was on the point of death, and consequently very much worse than you are, for she had fever, had lost her voice, was wasting away, was spitting her lungs up, and in fine, was despaired of, and given up by every one. Hear how he argues: the acridity of the humour, which attacks a part, either accidentally weakened or weak by nature, at last forms an ulcer, to which all the acrimony of the blood rushes; but then the spitting, and all the accidents which proceed from the part being injured, are themselves only a local evil, and all the remedies which may be applied, palliate and alleviate this local evil, without destroying the main disease. Whatever efforts may be made, if, through compassion for the patient, the principle of the disease be not fundamentally treated, he only lasts a time longer, and remains incurable. I only know then (says M. Seiffert) one sole means, which consists in turning away the humour from the course it has taken towards a weak part, and in directing it externally, with decision, and even with violence; consequently our physician, without attending to all the admirers,

relations, flatterers, &c., of our pretty little St. Alban, clapped two blisters on to her two arms. They did not produce enough, according to him, and he clapped one upon her shoulders, and if the humour had not come in abundance, he was going to put one on her chest. Executioner! was cried out on all sides; but he continued his plan. Finally, my friend, she coughed less, spat less, slept, found her appetite again, and when they were preparing to bewail her loss, they had to laugh with her about the universal plaster which had saved her life. She suffered, but what a difference in her fate! For the last six weeks she has been much better; she has recovered her flesh, her colour, and her voice, both for speaking and singing. This is what I have before my eyes. Seiffert, then, condemns you, *and so do I*, to return and be blistered, or take upon yourself to do it where you are; but be sure that after mature reflection we are all of opinion that you must submit to it, and that your future health depends on it. All the rest will only suit the ignorant. 'I should have done it to myself, immediately,' said Seiffert, 'if my pain in the chest had not ceased.' Cry out, if that solaces you; or come back, and we promise you to have no mercy for your repugnance.

"I cannot thank your friends and mine too much for all the care they take of you; but, if you are all in want of sufficient resolution to adopt our terrible regimen, come back to us, for there is no time to lose. Let us suffer for a few days, in order to save the entire edifice, and do not let us wait till the danger becomes more pressing.

"This is the wish and ardent desire of your friend,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

Beaumarchais' solicitude could not save young Francy. He died a short time after receiving this letter, and his will, which I have before me, contains

a clause which, taken in connexion with the passage already quoted from Julie's will, is an additional testimony in favour of the man of whom such an opinion was expressed by his friends on their deathbeds. After distributing amongst his family the somewhat considerable fortune which he had gained in the service of his patron, Francy terminates with these lines: "I appoint as executor of my will M. Caron de Beaumarchais, my friend; *the obligations I have towards him do not allow me to make him any legacy,* and I am convinced that he will willingly render me this last service." It seems to me that there is something flattering to Beaumarchais in the reason assigned for not making him any legacy, and for expecting this last service from him.

To complete the picture of Beaumarchais' life at this period, we should have to show him after the disastrous naval battle, in which the Count de Grasse lost, in 1782, the most magnificent of our fleets, burning with a noble zeal in the midst of the general consternation, and sending men into all the cafés of Paris to cry out "Subscriptions, subscriptions," in order to obtain the means of replacing the vessels lost; writing to all the chambers of commerce in the kingdom, forwarding to each of them a hundred louis, and pressing them to adopt his idea. This idea soon spread like a train of powder: each town, each corpo-

ration, offered a vessel, and the disaster experienced by our navy was repaired with wonderful rapidity. Beaumarchais himself hurried through all our maritime towns, in order to get up or increase the ardour of this patriotic movement. M. de Vergennes wrote to him as follows: "As minister I have no right to approve, but as citizen I do approve of the energetic feeling which you are communicating to your compatriots. Whatever success your step may have, it will none the less do honour to your zeal, and it is with much satisfaction that I compliment you upon it." Admiral D'Estaing, who went with Beaumarchais to Bordeaux, delighted with the co-operation of the author of "The Barber of Seville," wrote to him as follows, in his style, which is always somewhat droll: "When Jupiter's brain of fire was brought to bed of the belligerent Minerva, he certainly required a midwife like yourself." And Beaumarchais, continuing the metaphor, replied to the admiral: "Your midwife, as you call me, would only have made Jupiter produce a miscarriage instead of a Minerva, if, while disposing of everything which did not lead to the end, she had not paid the greatest attention to everything which contributed towards it." On the other side of these bursts of patriotism we should have to show Beaumarchais devoting himself to the most various commercial specu-

lations—the establishment of a Bank of Discount, the germ of the Bank of France;* a joint speculation with the brothers Périer for the foundation of the fire engine at Chaillot, &c; but that would take us too far: of all his commercial affairs of this date one alone, from its literary and historical importance, and the various incidents connected with it, appears to us to deserve particular attention. At that one we will pause.

* In order to supply the reader with an opportunity of appreciating all the variety of his aptitudes, we insert in the Appendix, No. 15, a note from him, containing the opinions he expressed at a deliberation of the Commissioners of the Bank of Discount.

CHAPTER XXIV.

VOLTAIRE'S WORKS.—THE MARGRAVE OF BADEN.—BEAUMARCHAIS AND CATHERINE OF RUSSIA.—OPPOSITION TO BEAUMARCHAIS' SPECULATION.—ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.

It required a man with all the enterprise of Beaumarchais, to undertake to print and publish, in 1779, the "Œuvres Complètes" of Voltaire. It was the largest publication that had then been attempted. The "Encyclopédie" was in thirty-three volumes only, while two editions of the "Œuvres Complètes" were to appear almost at the same time; the one in seventy volumes octavo, the other, a cheaper one, in ninety-two volumes duodecimo. It was not exactly the number of volumes which would have rendered this undertaking so alarming to any one but the author of "The Barber." There was a much greater difficulty still. Nearly half of Voltaire's works were prohibited in France. The prohibited works, nevertheless, circulated pretty freely, but from time to time the government thought itself compelled to perform an act of severity; editions were burnt, and frequently the very

men who bought and read them with the greatest eagerness sent to prison, for the sake of example, the shopkeepers who sold them. This clashing between what the law forbids and what society not only tolerates but seeks after, is one of the essential features of a state of society which is on the verge of ruin.

It was impossible then to print a complete edition of Voltaire's works in France; but it was necessary that, when printed, it should be possible for them to circulate them with some security. A severe prohibition would have proved mortal to so vast an enterprise. On the other side, considering its importance and the sensation it would make, how could it be hoped that a clamour would not be raised against it, and that even supposing government were inclined to favour it, they would not be forced to stop it. It was a risk no bookseller wished to run. Panckoucke, who had purchased Voltaire's unpublished works from his heirs, and who had at first thought of bringing out the complete edition, thought the enterprise too dangerous, and offered it to Beaumarchais. If I am to believe the unpublished Memoirs of Gudin, the Empress Catherine of Russia had made a proposal to Panckoucke to print the collection of Voltaire's works at St. Petersburg. Gudin says:—

"Beaumarchais, jealous of the honour of his country, no sooner heard of the steps taken by Catherine's agents, than he hurried to Versailles to point out to the Count

de Maurepas the disgrace it would be to France to allow the works of the man who was the greatest ornament to her literature to be published in Russia. The minister was much struck by what he said, but, placed between the two great bodies, the clergy and parliament, he feared their opposition and the clamour of those timid minds who, *too much like the birds of night* (Gudin is still speaking), *are scared by the light of day.* After reflecting some moments, M. de Maurepas said to Beaumarchais, 'I know but one man who would dare to run the risk of such an undertaking.' 'Who, my lord?' 'You.' 'Yes, doubtless I would venture it; but after I have embarked my fortune in it the clergy will appeal to parliament, the edition will be stopped, the editor and the printers disgraced, and the shame of France rendered complete and more evident than ever.' M. de Maurepas promised that the king's patronage should be given to a publication, which would have the assent of all sensible people, and which concerned the glory of his reign."

I am not quite sure that M. de Maurepas expressed himself thus; and it appears to me that Gudin lends him a little of his own philosophical language; but one thing certain is, that the old minister, who was as Voltairian as Voltaire himself, gave his secret patronage to the enterprise, and that it was carried on to the end, as will be seen, with the permanent connivance of the Director-General of the Post-Office.*

* M. de Maurepas had not always been favourable to Voltaire. During the period of his first ministry, under Louis XV., when the minister and the poet were both young, there had occurred between them, not an hostility arising from principles—for one was not more austere than the other—but a quarrel on the subject of Voltaire's election to the Academy, as successor of Cardinal de Fleury. Louis XV.,

We should be departing too much from our subject if we were to discuss here the question so often debated, of the influence of Voltaire's works. We are among those who think that the fundamental truths in religion, morals, and politics, are sufficiently strong to resist by themselves all attacks, from the spirit of licence and error. This eternal struggle between truth and error is not only the law of the moral world, but in some sort the crucible in which truth is tested, and from which it comes forth purified and revived. It was not truth, then, that perished beneath Voltaire's blows. All that part of his works in which he was only the echo of the faults, the sophisms, and the vices of his time, is already almost dead and buried; it is not the less certain that those who curse him in our day as the

considering that the Cardinal's eulogium would not proceed very well from Voltaire, had opposed his election, and as the poet continued to urge his claims to M. de Maurepas, the latter, in the heat of the debate, is asserted to have said to him, "I will crush you." This expression was reproduced in Condorcet's article on Voltaire, which was added to Beaumarchais' edition after M. de Maurepas' death; but Beaumarchais, while permitting Condorcet to reproduce this well-known expression, thought that, from gratitude for the patronage granted by the minister to his edition, he ought to add to the narrative of Condorcet a note of his own, in which he declared that M. de Maurepas, when questioned by him, always denied the expression attributed to him by Voltaire, and that he flattered himself, on the contrary, that he had done a great deal towards obtaining the permission granted to Voltaire to return to Paris towards the close of his life.

personification of Satan, reproduce every morning, above all when they think they have need of them for themselves, a sufficiently large number of correct ideas, which he contributed more than any one else to put into circulation. The collection of his works resembles that statue which is spoken of in the "Vision of Babouc," which was composed "of all metals, earths, and stones, the most precious and the most vile." Time has now eaten away and destroyed a portion of the statue. There are not many persons in the present day who, unless forced to do so, read the ninety-two volumes of Beaumarchais' edition. As to Beaumarchais, he thought himself obliged to collect, with scrupulous devotion, all that, during more than sixty years, had proceeded from the inexhaustible pen of Voltaire. To give more importance to this work, which was then quite an event, he founded, under the pompous title of "Literary, Typographical, and Philosophical Society," a company which consisted of himself alone ("the society, *which is myself*," he says in a letter to one of his intimate friends); and at the same time, not to exasperate the jealousy of any one, he modestly called himself the *general correspondent* of this ideal association. He bought unpublished manuscripts to the amount of one hundred and sixty thousand francs, at Panckoucke's book-shop, which scarcely contained more than one truly interesting paper—the fragments

of the life of Voltaire, written by himself. He despatched an agent to England to purchase, for a sum of about 150,000 livres, the best printing types of the time, those of Baskerville; he sent another to Holland to study the manufacture of paper; he bought three paper-mills in the Vosges, and at last occupied himself with seeking beyond the limits of France, upon the frontier, for some neutral ground where he could found with security a vast typographical establishment.

The Margrave of Baden possessed at Kehl an old fort, since demolished, of which he made no use. Beaumarchais asked his permission to establish himself in this fort, on paying for it, let it be understood, and to collect there a large number of workmen, who would spend in his margravate all the money they gained by printing Voltaire. The proposition was seductive, but it presented some difficulties. The editor of Voltaire, a cautious man, required that the prince should bind himself, in writing, in case of legal proceedings, to allow the company to come upon his possessions in Alsace. The Margrave refused to do so, and Beaumarchais abandoned his demand. The Margrave on his side exacted a slight concession from Beaumarchais, which was nothing less than the right to suppress everything in the works of Voltaire that was very offensive to religion and morality, promising at the same

time to use this right with extreme moderation. Gudin maliciously asserts, that what most disturbed the Margrave was, the fear of passing for an accomplice in the insolence of the author of "Candide" towards the illustrious family of "Thunder-ten-Tronck" in particular, and the petty princes of Germany in general. However this might be, after much debating the editor of Voltaire sent his ultimatum to the Margrave in the form of a letter, apparently *to his agent* at Kehl, who is commissioned to communicate it to his Highness. This letter seems curious to me from its effrontery. In order to appreciate the originality of the rather impertinent passages it contains, the reader must figure to himself Beaumarchais' agent reading this *official* document, in a very serious manner, to the Margrave of Baden.

"Paris, February 25, 1780.

"The request, Sir, that you sent us, as having been presented in our name to his Highness Mgr. the Margrave of Baden, has been read and approved by all the society. The objections of which you have given us an account are of two sorts. The first, which relates to the estates of his Highness in Alsace, appears to us quite removed by your answer, of which we all approve. To attend to the second, which relates to the mutilation of the works of a celebrated man, is not in our power if it even accorded with our inclination. You might be able to call to mind that one of the conditions of the purchase of these works was, that we should not take any liberties with the works of the great man. It is himself entire that Europe is expecting, and if we were to take away the

black hairs or the white, according to the opinion of each moralist, he would be left bald, and we should be ruined.

"France, Geneva, Switzerland, Holland, swarm with the works we are wished to leave out in this edition. It would be necessary, perhaps, to persist in this, if we printed them separately, as they are done everywhere, but if, in sixty volumes of his complete works, certain passages, or even whole pieces, which, while charming some persons, shock the austerity of others, it is impossible for editors of complete works to separate them.

"I cannot well understand what principle leads a government to this severity. If they could destroy what displeased them, and if the authority of each administration had a universal influence, there would be a meaning in these prohibitions; but, as in travelling through the world, persons change customs, tastes, and opinions with their horses at each frontier, neither the man who writes for all, nor the company, which promises a celebrated author complete, can submit to any of these private restrictions. 'Montaigne,' who is printed everywhere with advantage, has allowed himself much freedom of another sort. His chapter of 'La Boiteuse' in which he has purposely inserted a verse containing a very obscene word, in order to make the work, as he says, a book for the boudoir, has never been withdrawn from his works; the editor who would suppress them, would be dishonoured as a fool, and no one would purchase his edition. It should be the same with all great men. You have very well remarked, that all these prohibitions relating to blasphemous and immoral writings are liable to be applied with undue latitude, which opens far too many roads to persecution. M. de Voltaire, the first man of our time, had his particular opinions. He expressed them with all that philosophical freedom and exquisite taste of which he has always been the model. What blasphemy is there in that? He has given his opinion upon every govern-

ment, upon every sect, and his great system being universal toleration, what can be taken from the works of this great man, without weakening the whole? The tales of La Fontaine, with prints, have been published at Paris with *the permission of the king*, because it has long since been felt that it is impossible to proscribe that which is in everybody's hand, and which forms the delight of people of taste.

"The society thinks then, that whatever benefit may result to it from the situation at Kehl, its first thought must be security for its works, and that it ought to prefer a prince philosophical enough to attract to his country a magnificent literary establishment, of which his country will have all the advantage, to an administration sufficiently rigorous to hesitate about such great advantages, through classical or controversial considerations. We might be stopped in the midst of expenses, amounting to several millions, because a philosopher has jested about the 'Canticles,' a composition in itself so strange, that no one has ever dared to show it to modest eyes, or read it to chaste ears! What would become of philosophy? What would become of our success? And, how the English, the Dutch, the Swiss, the Genoese, and even the French pirates, would laugh at us, whilst profiting by our spoils, for having established ourselves in states where they imposed such hard conditions on us, whilst we were offered, at a little distance, all that liberty which it is quite certain a society formed upon such noble principles would never abuse.

"Thank, then, Sir, all who have shown you good will; thank his Highness in the name of the society, for the kindness he has deigned to testify to you; but this establishment is of too much importance to permit us to establish it in states where they oppose such obstacles to us, and with so much persistence.

"You have offered not to print the works of any living author, *benè sit;* not to make any claims upon the lands of

the Prince in Alsace, *benè sit;* not to add one word to the works of the great man, which could shock the opinions or the very austere manners of our timid age, *benè sit;* but we will not lop our author for all the readers of Europe, who desire his works entire, to say, in their turn, on seeing him thus mutilated: *Ah! che schiagwra d'aver lo senza. . . . .** And what stupid pedants were his melancholy editors!

"We all salute you, and I, who have made myself the organ of the Philosophical Society, am, with all those sentiments which you know I possess towards you, Sir,

"Your very humble and obedient servant,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

The Margrave of Baden, seeing that it was absolutely necessary to choose between his scruples of morality and the advantage of letting Kehl, learning besides that another German prince (of Neuwied) appeared disposed to arrange with Beaumarchais, resigned himself to a capitulation of his morality, and allowed Voltaire to be printed without mutilation. Truth obliges me to add a fact which is not known, namely, that Beaumarchais, resembling in this respect his patron Voltaire, while yielding nothing to the moral scruples of a little German prince, was not wanting in complaisance when the question of modesty was not in play. Thus, the same man who refused to give up for the Margrave of Baden the paraphrase of the "Canticles," consented, to please

* We need hardly say that Beaumarchais reproduced this indecent passage from one of Voltaire's stories in full.

Catherine II., to cancel portions of the correspondence of the Empress with Voltaire, and to incur by that an increase of expense of which he vainly sought to be reimbursed in a letter to the Prince of Nassau, under date of the 6th October, 1790.

"I had begged you, mon prince, to learn from her Majesty whether she had given any orders on the subject of the just satisfaction guaranteed to me in her name, when I promised MM. de Montmorin and Grimm to cancel in every copy of every edition of Voltaire the portions which her Majesty appeared to object to. I had given you a letter, in which these details were clearly explained, in which I stated, as a certain fact, that we had been obliged to reprint 412,000 pages, in order to put all the editions in the state she wished; that this expense, added to the undoing and binding of this immense collection, had not amounted to less than 15,000 livres. For above two years, we have not had a word of reply on the subject."

To superintend the composition, printing, and publication of these 162 volumes (for the two editions), to introduce them fraudulently, though with the connivance of the authorities, but with the risk of a permanent probibition, was an enterprise which was singularly laborious for a man already overwhelmed by so many other occupations. Beaumarchais seemed sometimes to bend under the weight of the burden. "Here am I," he exclaimed, "obliged to learn my letters at paper-making, printing, and bookselling." However, he learnt his new trade quickly enough,

and not one of the least interesting parts of his correspondence is that in which he discusses, from Paris, with his agent at Kehl, all the details of this immense undertaking. This agent, named Le Tellier, was a very intelligent young man, who had done much to force the idea upon Beaumarchais, and who had decided him to undertake this edition, by promising to rid him of all the cares of the material details; but he was of a chimerical turn of mind; he wished to combine with the publication of the edition of Voltaire several other enterprises; he was, besides, very susceptible, and very imperious towards his subordinates. Beaumarchais directs, restrains, and mollifies him; and, in the easy frankness of his private letters, appears not only full of judgment, and often very witty, but also full of gentleness and kindness, and actuated throughout by a feeling of commercial fairness which deserves to be remarked.

"Paris, March 10, 1780.

"When I write to you, mon cher, it is just as if I spoke to you. My style is tinged by the colour of my mind, and you should answer me as if we were conversing together. I have not reproached you with negligence, but perhaps with wishing to embrace too much, and it is the fear of grasping too little which leads me incessantly to these reflections. All that we undertake has an embarrassing aspect, and we do not proceed simply enough to attain the end within the given time. How can we, for example, promise, in the early months of 1782, an edition which has neither hearth nor home in March, 1780, the paper-mills having to be made, the

type to be founded, the printing presses to be put up, and the establishment to be formed?

"We have already lost a year; we hardly know what we have to do. Your specimen of paper, No. 3, is so inferior, that it would be folly to sell copies printed on it at six francs a volume. In adopting mediocrity in every particular, just as obstacles present themselves, you will offer but a very inferior edition to a discontented public, and I own that this fear, which has come upon me, in the midst of the promises I have made to all the world, and that hope of procuring a fine work which had warmed my heart—this fear of mediocrity, I say, poisons my life. You have paper, which is more than inferior for the 8vo.; the letters will not appear smooth on this thin paper, they will have no elegance, and the booksellers, offended at our unwillingness to make use of them, will load us with sarcasms and public reproaches. I own I could not support them. I do not know how to compromise with myself, and to be contented with less, as I see the difficulty of giving more. This is not what I expected; and the height of the ridiculous would be, I acknowledge, to have embraced a trade which would be honourable if well carried on, in order to be placed in the class of vile impostors and speculators in publications, as I hear those termed, and term them myself, who deceive the public in a similar manner. If you have led me on, by my confidence in your knowledge and resources in connexion with these kinds of works, do not at least let me fall below my engagements with the public; you would poison a career which did not require books to make it honourable, and I should be grieved that the only fruit of the friendship you have inspired me with should be so bitter to me.

"Excited by the facilities you showed me of doing a good thing, honourable to literature and to myself, I allowed myself to be engaged in it without knowing anything of the details which might accelerate or retard, or even destroy the

success that you promised me. Everybody agrees in saying you will not have finished in four years, and even when I endeavour to combat this opinion, they laugh and say, '*You will see, you will see.*'

"To make persons wait is an evil, but to make them wait to give them something inferior, is a hundred times worse. I fear you have deceived yourself, and these samples of inferior papers are a very bad augury.

"I exhibit this anxiety, because in the midst of the most serious and engrossing occupations this affair adds to the trouble which surrounds me. Its completion appears so difficult that I tremble at the vexatious predictions which are made on every side. You flatter yourself that your paper will improve in the working, and I can see that we shall expose its worthlessness as soon as the prospectus appears, if we take as a model your No. 3, at six francs a volume.

"After having said all I am afraid of, I will now endeavour to encourage you. Do not allow any mediocrity: it is on that point they are expecting you to fail; and without troubling yourself about little uncertain hopes, take a clear course in everything, so that you may know absolutely what to adhere to, for mediocrity is an evil to which I will never consent."

Several letters relate particularly to the intractable disposition of Le Tellier; the workmen he employed named him the *tyrant of Kehl;* they were often dissatisfied and returned to France; everywhere they complained of him, and Beaumarchais took the greatest pains to teach him how men should be governed:—

"The people of Kehl," he wrote to him, "seem very much

irritated against you. There is sometimes nothing more than this wanted to overthrow the best enterprise. I think you are always strictly right, but from the view which I take, it seems to me that the severity of your arguments, and the pride of your manner, remove those from you whom a little more gentleness would have preserved. Whatever opinion I may have of your zeal and your talents, as you cannot do everything yourself, the art of keeping persons to assist you in your work appears to be wanting in you. Only think that I have not received one letter since you have been engaged with Voltaire which does not contain a reproach against you, whether it comes from Paris, from London, from Deux-Ponts, or from Kehl. From whatever place it may be, I am always attacked. It is impossible not to conclude from this that, with the best intentions in the world, you isolate yourself by something disdainful, which offends common men, who always judge by the exterior. You will tell me it is not your fault if you have bad persons about you: but I must reply to you, that the mass of the people and of workmen are the same everywhere; that all establishments are formed with tools which are not better than those you employ, and that in general all the complaints which are made of you have their origin in an air of disdainful superiority, which displeases every one. This inflexible haughtiness is what has just ruined M. Necker.*

"It is all very well for a man to have the finest talents: as soon as he sells his superiority too dearly to those who are his subordinates he makes so many enemies by it, and everything goes to the devil, without its being any one's fault. What you should conclude from all this is, that moderate, conciliatory, and circumspect, I can at least serve as an example of the manner in which you should deal with men,

* This minister had just been removed from office for the first time.

and it would be very desirable that every one should be able to say of you, what I am determined always to put it in your power to say of your servant and friend,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

It required three years for Beaumarchais to organize an enterprise started upon so vast a plan. Independently of the material difficulties, it was necessary to make a selection from the numerous printed and manuscript works attributed to Voltaire, many of which were not his, to compare and arrange pieces, which had appeared twice over,* to collect the correspondence of the author, and to make a choice from among his letters.† The literary superintend-

* In the preface to the first volume of the Kehl edition, the editors declared they had only suppressed a very few pieces, which, they said, had been left too unfinished for the respect due to the memory of Voltaire to allow them to be printed. It is certain that they did not abuse this right of suppression. In printing, for example, under the title of Philosophy, several rhapsodies, without wit or taste, in which the old man of Ferney, fallen into a sort of pagan dotage, travesties and insults in the grossest manner our Saviour and the martyrs, Beaumarchais has done no harm to Christianity, but he has greatly injured Voltaire.

† The letters of Voltaire led Beaumarchais on farther than he anticipated. He had, at first, thought of making the whole edition in 60 vols. 8vo., which was the number he had announced. The "Correspondence" required 10 vols. more. Some subscribers complained of it, but in general this addition was well received. We may assert that, in this voluminous collection, the "Correspondence" is one of the parts which have suffered least from time, and which are read with the greatest interest, as much on account of Voltaire's charming talent for epistolary writing, as for the valuable information it furnishes both about the man himself and the age he lived in.

ence of the enterprise, comprehending the revision, both of the manuscripts and the proofs, with the preparation of the commentaries and notes, was confided to Condorcet, who, according to La Harpe, performed it rather badly: Condorcet's commentaries do not indeed strike us as wonderful. As to Beaumarchais, he only interfered in this part of the work, with a modesty and reserve which could scarcely have been expected from an editor and proprietor, who was himself a writer, and who might on this account have had some literary pretensions, and have been led to speak of himself in connection with Voltaire. Beaumarchais' notes are very few in this Kehl edition; they relate in general to facts, but they are sometimes rather original.*

It was not till 1783 (although the prospectus was issued in 1780) that the first volume of the edition of Voltaire's works appeared. Beaumarchais neglected

* Thus, for example, in publishing Voltaire's letters, in which the latter interested himself about him without knowing him, and defended him against the odious rumours which were circulated at the time of his lawsuit against Goëzman, Beaumarchais could not resist his desire of saying a word on this subject. Voltaire wrote to M. d'Argental: "A quick, passionate, impetuous man, like Beaumarchais, might give a blow to his wife, or two blows to his two wives, but he does not poison them." The editor adds this note: "I certify that this Beaumarchais, sometimes beaten by women, as most men have been who have loved them very much, never committed the shameful act of raising his hand against one."—*Note by the Correspondent of the Literary Typographical Society.*

nothing to attract subscribers; not contented with making as much noise as possible in the foreign papers,* he invented a plan which has often been imitated since, under various forms: he offered prizes in the shape of medals and lottery tickets. A sum of 200,000 francs was devoted by him to forming 400 prizes in money in favour of the first 4000 subscribers; and although that number of subscribers was never attained, the promised lottery was drawn exactly at the periods fixed. The two editions could not be finished in less than seven years. This tardiness is explained by the numerous personal misfortunes which Beaumarchais had to undergo during that time, and by several obstacles inherent to the publication itself. He had reckoned upon the protection of the first minister, with whom he was in great favour; but M. de Maurepas died in November, 1781, and the editor of Voltaire lost in him a support against the attacks of the clergy and parliament. The first of these parties complained several times to the king of the toleration the minister showed in favour of the works of an adversary to the church: the second did not, I think, extend its zeal to any formal proceeding. They, however, circulated a very violent pamphlet, entitled "Denunciation to the Parliament, of the Subscription

* The edition, being forbidden by law, could not be advertised in the French journals.

for the Works of Voltaire," with this motto: *Ululate et clamate.** Beaumarchais replied to this pamphlet in the foreign journals, by jesting on the motto, but still continued his publication. The truth is, there was not at this time, in the minds of the government, sufficient conviction of any sort, to urge them to a serious and continued attack upon an undertaking in which Beaumarchais had public opinion with him. He had lost M. de Maurepas, but he had gained M. de Calonne, and, above all, the brother of the minister, the Abbé de Calonne, to whom he gave excellent dinners, and who in return gave him great assistance in facilitating the introduction and circulation of Voltaire.

"I have the honour to address you, Monsieur l'Abbé," Beaumarchais wrote to him in September, 1786, "a fresh letter we have received from Kehl, with a copy of a letter from the Keeper of the Seal to the Fermiers Généraux, and a letter from the Fermiers to their director at Strasbourg, who, being at this moment in Paris, can hear the *necessary orders or arrangements for the introduction of Voltaire.* As soon as you have anything to acquaint me with respecting it, do not let me remain in ignorance. I have proof in hand that it was with the consent of the king's ministers † I com-

* As this anonymous pamphlet, which is rather well written, and curious enough, from its very violence, has never, I think, been reproduced, it will now be found in the Appendix, No. 16; I have added to it the short reply which Beaumarchais published in the foreign journals.

† In what did this proof consist? I have been unable to find it in Beaumarchais' papers.

menced this ruinous enterprise, on which I have laid out two millions, with the frightful risk of losing them. It was then a question of the honour of the nation, and of emulation in several arts, for which we were dependent upon foreigners. Now, it is a persecution without example, though I was promised there should never be any. You know my tender and deep gratitude.

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

The persecution was not very lasting, or very severe, to judge of it by the following letter, which, while giving us the exact date of the last volume of the complete works of Voltaire, proves at the same time the connivance of the government during the whole transaction. It is addressed by Beaumarchais to the Director-General of the Post Office, M. d'Ogny.

"Paris, September 1, 1790.

"Monsieur,—I can now only offer you barren thanks for the good offices you rendered me in most difficult times. This volume of the 'Life of Voltaire,' which I have the honour to address to you, completes the work.

"But, Sir, I can never forget that without your kind assistance we should have remained on the road, and, expiring at our work, should have been unable to give to impatient Europe the collection of the works of the great man. This bold enterprise has been a loss to me of above a million, in capital and interest; but thanks to you, Sir, I have kept my word, and that is a consolation to me. Some necessary matters, which have been delayed, still occupy our presses. Everything that comes from them, Sir, shall be addressed to you, as a slight tribute of my gratitude.

"I salute, honour, and love you.

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

This letter and several others proves that, of all Beaumarchais' speculations, the edition of Voltaire was the most unfortunate. Expecting an enthusiastic success, he had printed 15,000 copies, and he had scarcely 2000 subscribers. Whether the previous edition, that of Geneva by Cramer, in spite of its incompleteness, had injured his, or that the delay in producing the work had cooled the public, or that the fanaticism for Voltaire had already begun to decline, or that the state of agitation into which France was soon afterwards thrown, rendered readers less disposed to purchase so expensive a work, it is certain that Beaumarchais lost the enormous sums he had risked, and that, after the dissolution of his establishment at Kehl, where he besides printed an edition of Rousseau and a few other works, all the benefits he derived from his trade of publisher were masses of printed paper, which were heaped up in his house in the Faubourg St. Antoine, which afterwards caused some rather unfriendly visits from the sovereign people, who were persuaded that the author of "The Barber of Seville" was monopolizing either wheat or arms, and were quite astonished to find there no other provisions or arms than those of an intellectual description.

The annoyance of having made an unfortunate speculation is reflected in Beaumarchais' correspondence on the subject of the edition of Voltaire: he

is not always in a good humour; and as it was to him that the subscribers from all parts of France addressed their remonstrances, which were often rude and unjust, he kept up with them a *commercial* correspondence, which in parts is very amusing. Here, for example, we have a bookseller of Versailles, M. Blaizot, who transmits to him a letter from one of his customers, worded as follows:—

"Several persons have fifteen new volumes of Voltaire, and they assure me that Beaumarchais has completed his series. If this be true, I beg of you, M. Blaizot, to procure me the continuation of the series included in my subscription; the money is quite ready.

"H."

Beaumarchais, who was undoubtedly in a bad temper at this moment, thought M. H.'s letter uncivil, and replied by the following note:—

"Monsieur Blaizot, inform H. he shall have his fifteen volumes when the cessation of the proscriptions will allow them to be delivered to every one. If I have given to some Frenchmen the dangerous preference of sending from Kehl these fifteen volumes before that time, it is because they have asked for them in a tone that was agreeable to Beaumarchais. I do not know H., but from his style I imagine that H. is the initial for *Huron*.

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

Elsewhere we find some Bordeaux merchants remembering very late that they subscribed to the first part of Voltaire, and haughtily demanding it. Here is Beaumarchais' answer:—

"MM. Betman and Desclaux, merchants of Bordeaux, are droll subscribers. It is not until April, 1791, that they awake with a start to ask for the first part of the works of the great man, subscribed for twelve years before, commenced seven years before, and finished about two years before. If this work had been bound in sugar or in coffee, the whole would have been carried away a long time ago; but never mind, it is owing to them. . . ."

Further on we find M. Laustin, who calls himself President of the Foreign Exportations to Rethel-Mazarin in Champagne, rating Beaumarchais severely, and asking him for all sorts of explanations, although he was only a subscriber at third hand. The editor of Voltaire answered as follows:—

"You are, perhaps, the only person, M. le President, who do not know what we made known throughout Europe, nearly a year since, by means of the foreign journals, the French ones being then closed to us, namely, that all the editions of Voltaire are completed, and in course of delivery, to almost the last volume, containing his life and the index, which will be distributed separately.

"You are, perhaps, also Sir, the only person who is ignorant that two gratuitous lotteries, composing together a present of 200,000 francs, given by us to our subscribers, were drawn publicly at the stated times more than three years since; that for the 8vo edition, all the fours, and for the second 12mo edition, all the sixes, gained prizes in money or in copies, which were paid as persons presented themselves to receive them.

"You are, perhaps, the only person who do not know even that there remain to be delivered to the subscribers of the 12mo. twenty-four volumes, and not thirteen. Persons may

be ignorant of these things at Rethel-Mazarin in Champagne, when they do not read the public journals; but what ought to be known, Sir, in all places is, that before giving lessons on equity to others, persons would do well to examine themselves to see if they do not want some lessons in prudence, discretion and politeness: for it is not enough to be *le Président Des Traites Foraines* to Rethel-Mazarin in Champagne, it is also cessary, before all things, to be civil: that is a settled point.

"But, since, notwithstanding your *judicious* displeasure, you still do me the favour to say you are my servant, with the most perfect sentiments, permit me, so that I may not be in arrears with you, to assure you that I am, with the most exquisite gratitude for your lessons, *M. le Président Des Traites Foraines, &c.,*

"Your very humble, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

"Soldier of the Citizen Guard of Paris."

Such was the style of conversation Beaumarchais kept up with his uncivil subscribers. "Judge, Sir," he writes to another, "what effect an attack like yours must have in an affair which has been equally complicated and ruinous, and in which all engagements have been fulfilled with the most scrupulous exactitude." We are indebted, without doubt, to some similar outburst on the part of the editor, Beaumarchais, in claiming an unpublished quatrain of Voltaire's, for this well-turned note of a literary man of his time, Cailhava. The note is not dated, but it evidently relates to the edition of Voltaire:—

"In faith, my brother in Thalia, I have already told you, and I repeat it, you are a universal man. When you write

dramas, they are affecting; when you write comedies, they are amusing. Are you a musician? you enchant; a pleader? you gain all your law-suits; a privateer? you beat the enemy; you enrich yourself, you discuss your rights with sovereigns; a lover? *you are always the same:* at length, do you become a publisher? you are one indeed; why, you are like all the publishers together; witness the end of your letter. I send you the verse, the subject of the agreement, and am, my brother in Thalia,

"Your very humble, &c.,

"CAILHAVA."

Beaumarchais had indeed been a universal man: for in the midst of his busy life, as political agent, shipowner, editor, speculator of every kind; while fulfilling the obligations of these extensive claims, he still found time to consecrate a part of his evenings to justifying the rather stale title of "brother in Thalia," which Cailhava gives him. "What particularly characterised him," says Gudin, "was the faculty of suddenly changing his occupation, and of directing an attention as strong and as entire upon the new object, as upon the one he had just quitted." Beaumarchais called this, "*closing the drawer of an affair.*" Let us try to imitate him on this point; let us now close the drawer of the edition of Voltaire, and of his speculations in general, to open that one which relates to society and to theatrical affairs in connexion with that comedy which everybody knows, and which was in itself one of the great events of the eighteenth century.

APPENDIX.

No. 1 (page 22).

Unpublished Memorial addressed by Sedaine to Beaumarchais, on the Relations between Authors and the Actors of the Comédie-Française.

I assure you, Sir, that it appears very difficult to me to arrange and establish something which will provide, I do not say for all, but for the greater part of the annoyances; authors and actors are walking on windbags.

My first reflection is, that it is scarcely proper for an author who is about to read a piece to be thrown in the midst of an assembly where he has no friend, nor any one who can and ought to give him confidence to keep down the tone of depreciation, irony, and mockery which are almost inevitable on the part of young persons who are not serious from their profession or education.

I should desire the author to have the privilege of being accompanied by two of his friends; that the assembly when a reading took place should be presided over by a man of letters, who should be the immediate representative of the first gentleman of the service. I should like this man of letters enjoy consideration on his own account, to have distinguished himself worthily in literature like Crebillon, Bret, Saurin, or another (I know only a few). The president would hold the bell, would cause silence, and would not state his opinion with regard to the work, unless, in the exceptional

case of an equal division of votes, the assembly should ask him for his own. The reading should be gone through by the author, or by one of those who accompany him, before a table arranged in front of the president and opposite to him, as well as to the two persons brought by the author, for I do not wish them to act as the author's partisans, and to electrify the company by tears or affected laughter. It is better for a man of letters to preside who will say to the author, "Read more loudly," or "Begin that sentence again, it was not heard; what is the name of the piece? who are the people?" In a word, he should be interrogated, so as to reassure him and give him courage. It might be better for two men of letters to preside in turns; an author may fear the presidency of the one, then he might ask the other what would be allowed him. Again, if these presidents compose plays, they should neither read nor preside: in this case they should even have the delicacy not to name themselves, and to cause their works to be read by some friend who is an author. When the reading is over, the author and his friends should retire, the voting should be proceeded with in the ordinary manner, and from the result a general statement should be drawn up, seen, examined, and balanced by the president, who could then represent that such and such a reason, which is perhaps only found in one of the voting papers, is made of too much importance. He would never speak except in the character of councillor and conciliator; if he found any animosity, harshness, or bad feeling, he would beg the actors to consider that they had only to think of the interests of the public and the theatre, without reference to authors.

The general statement having been drawn up and copied out, the author would be requested to come in, with or without his friends. The *semainier* would say to him, "Sir, your piece is received, and you are requested to come in," or simply, "You are requested to come in," if it were not received. The result of the ballot would then be read to him,

and if the work were received on condition of certain corrections being made, the author would be provided with a copy of the result, which should be short and concise without going into details, such as—the style is negligent, the interest is slight, there is a double intrigue, &c.

If an author had any subject of complaint against the theatre he should state it, and the president should have the power of calling the *semainier* to him and confronting him with the author, so as to put the affair in its true light, arrange it, and if that should not be possible, report on it immediately to the first gentleman on duty, who should decide according to his judgment.

What has caused the troubles between the authors and the actors up to the present time has been almost always the difficulty of obtaining justice. The superiors have scarcely ever heard more than one side; the actor, in giving his version, always triumphs if he is a good reasoner and a fine speaker, if, supported by his art, he makes use of all the expressions which the most thorough submission can suggest; for although the grimaces which express the most profound respect are but a gross snare, all men are taken in by them, and a pretty actress is another kind of snare. The authors are singularly ill-treated in the matter of profit, this vile profit, as it is called, in order to prevent persons mentioning it. What! If there were twelve hundred francs deposited with my notary for me, should I be avaricious to wish him to give me the twelve hundred francs in full? Or, to make the comparison more exact, we are nine speculators in the same affair, of which we are to share the profits; eight speculators come to an understanding to deceive the ninth, and the latter is to be called avaricious because he wishes for what belongs to him! Listen to the actors, they will continue their verbiage until to-morrow, and you will not advance a single step. This is what happened to me.

After the "Philosophe sans le Savoir" had had twenty-

eight successive representations, I received what was due to me; it was reckoned as follows:—

Net profit 60,000 francs, out of which the quarter for the poor comes to 15,000 francs. Accordingly, there remains the sum of 45,000 francs. What! for twenty-eight days the quarter for the poor amounts to 15,000 francs? What they pay is 60,000 francs a year, which comes to about 170 francs a day, and ought to be reckoned at that with the daily expenses, light, attendance, &c. Twenty-eight days at 170 francs, make, I think, 4760 francs; so that upon this item alone they have taken from the authors' ninth share 1000 francs. Let us continue. The actors not having announced the last representation of my piece, I thought, with reason, that the succeeding representations were to be counted to me. When a certain number had taken place, I asked the cashier for the money. He said to me, "I took your account to be signed, but the actors informed me that your piece had fallen within the rules." I then obtained the authorisation of M. le Duc de Duras to examine their books, and they were obliged to return me five or six hundred francs, which were due to me, and which they wished to appropriate. I am forgetting to tell you, that before claiming the protection of the first gentleman, I had paid the actors the attention of making my request to them in writing; but my letter unfortunately finished with this sentence, which sounded offensively to them: "However, gentlemen, if you have need of this slender assistance, I give up what is due to me with all my heart, and beg you to accept it."

They exclaimed against the unbecoming nature of this phrase, and applied for a sort of satisfaction to their honour. The Duke de Duras had the kindness to propose it to me. I refused to make it; and at his desk wrote to the actors to say, that I was satisfied with the actors for the resolution they had taken to remit me my share, and that I begged them to accept all the profit derived from the revival

of my work which I gave up to them, and they did accept it. I pass in silence over other injuries, as these details weary me, and you also without doubt, Sir; but I have never had an opportunity of coming into contact with the actors about our mutual affairs, without feeling the necessity of putting some order into things which would have caused me more annoyance, if I had not been stopped by the reflection that we must pardon men for going out of their place, when their profession is to be never in it.

In affairs of money between an author and the Théâtre-Français, my president should examine and decide; he would have every means of shaming any man of letters who made a false claim, and of keeping from the notice of the first gentleman any discussion which would be dishonourable to literature. I will say nothing about the crying injustice of the actors, in appropriating the profits of a work, after having caused it to fall within the rules; for a good work ought never so to fall. What an honour for the Théâtre-Français and for literature, if the posterity of the great Corneille, instead of receiving assistance from the compassion of the actor, received the thousand or twelve hundred livres a year, which the ninth part of his works might produce.

What! this great man has created the French stage; has created Racine and his descendants; has caused the French language to be spoken through the whole of Europe; has given us eternal models of greatness of mind, of which we stand so much in need to raise us to a proper tone, and the actors are the sole inheritors of his labours, without giving any share in them to his posterity.

The actors of the Italian Theatre are more considerate: they have solicited the authors to accept the profits of their works during their life. When this example is brought before the French actors, they say, "We should think so; they have need of authors, but, as for us, we can do without them." Is it permitted to enunciate such a reason aloud?

Finally, Sir, you will do yourself much honour by arranging an affair which cannot be very agreeable to the first gentleman, and which presents various points of ridiculousness and infamy.

There are some other reflections, Sir, which I should have added to the above, but any amelioration must proceed necessarily from a disinterested superintendent, who is only attached with the Theatre for its advantage, and with literature for its honour.

I have the honour of being, with the most distinguished sentiments, your very humble and very obedient servant.

J. SEDAINE.

June 19, 1775.

No. 11 (page 46).

Note of Marmontel's on himself.

M. de Beaumarchais will have the kindness to remember, that during the thirty-six years which M. Marmontel has passed at Paris, he has never ceased to work; that he has three times gained the prize of poetry, given by the Académie Française; that at the age of twenty-two he produced his first tragedy, "Denys le Tyran;" in the following year "Aristomène," both of which met with success; that, with less good fortune, he produced three other tragedies; that the "Moral Tales," in three volumes, have been translated into all languages, and are among books from which all the youth of Europe learns our tongue; that "Bélisaire," which was censured by the Sorbonne, is nevertheless regarded as an estimable work, at least as far as morals are concerned, and that it is translated into every language, as well as the "Moral Tales;" that the "Incas" are also an irreprehensible work, in which virtue is breathed throughout; that the proprietors of the new edition of the "Encyclopédie" applied to M. Marmontel to re-write entirely all the literary portion, and that he has contributed to the supplement of this dictionary more than

a hundred articles, the greater part of considerable length, and forming altogether a course of *belles-lettres;* that his translation of "Lucan" is much esteemed; that after these assiduous labours, which have only given money to the publishers, he finds himself, at the age of fifty-seven, unable to take from his bare means of subsistence sufficient to insure bread to his wife and children after him; that the censure of the Sorbonne has been tacitly disavowed by the Parliament, in which no one was found to say a single word against this book, and by the Government, which has not revoked the privilege, so that "Bélisaire" is reprinted, and sold at present with the privilege of the king; that, with regard to the verses against the Duke d'Aumont, which were attributed to him, and for which he lost the privilege of publishing the "Mercure," it has been proved by the testimony of M. de la Ferté, intendant of the "Menus Plaisirs," that they were by Curi, a former intendant of the Menus, whose secret was kept until his death; that accordingly there is nothing to reproach M. de Marmontel with, either in his writings or conduct.

Marmontel has just explained himself with too little modesty but he does so in the ear of friendship. M. de Beaumarchais will only take the substance of it all, and only say a few words about it.

No. 12 (page 179).

Private Memorial to the King's Minister, and Manifesto for the State, remitted to the Count de Vergennes, October 26, 1777.

In the critical state at which events have arrived, with the certainty we possess that the English people are crying out loudly, and without shame, for war; that they are making offers of every kind to their king with this object, such as to

raise instantly the national militia, and pay the expenses; such as to furnish voluntarily, by shire or county, a certain number of soldiers and sailors, provided they be employed against Spain and France; what remains for us to do?

We have still three courses to choose from. The first is good for nothing; the second would be the safest; the third is the most noble; but a proper combination of the third and second course may instantly make the king of France the most powerful in the known world.

The first course, which is good for nothing, absolutely nothing, is to continue to do what we are doing, or rather what we are not doing; to remain passive still longer in presence of the turbulent activity of our neighbours, to persist in taking no decided course, and to wait for events without acting; for between now and the 2nd of February next, the English ministry will, perhaps, be changed, and Lords Chatham and Shelburn, the former of whom has been offered Lord Germain's place, the latter that of Lord Suffolk, on condition of abandoning the Whigs, and who have refused, may change their mind, and pretend for a moment to have become Tories, in order to get to the head of affairs. Now, if this evil happens to us, is there a single educated man who doubts that at the first moment they will sign with one hand, at any cost, peace with America, and with the other, the express order to attack our vessels, and fall upon our possessions; which would throw the English and the Americans on our hands at the same time. Or, otherwise, in spite of the outcries of the nation, and the agitation of affairs, in spite of the indignation which will soon be raised against the government, by the confession of Generals Burgoyne and Howe, to the effect that *they have only been the servile instruments of an inexpert and despotic minister*, the present ministry will keep in power. But, as all are equally convinced of the necessity of putting a stop to a war which is so fatal to England, and as the present ministry can no longer hope to explain away its

past faults, but only to cover them by flattering the nation with the speedy hope of repairing its losses at our expense, it must not be doubted that from the present agitation of all minds, and of all the great and little councils which are held in London, a suspension of hostilities with America will result at least, so that the wrongs of the continent may be taken into consideration and England be allowed a moment's breathing time. But when the first step towards peace has been once made, we may be very certain that it will be too late for France to declare in favour of America. Perhaps even the chief of the American deputation will already have gone over to London, and the war have been commenced against us, without any notice, like the last. Perhaps before we have been able to save our merchant vessels from the first effects of the fury of England, it will have swallowed up five-sixths of them! At all events, it is certain that during the last two months several English vessels of war have gone out under pretence of cruising in the Channel, but with orders and destinations so little known, that no one in Europe is yet aware where they have commenced cruising. Who knows even whether the last packet sent by the Government to America has not already brought the news of some suspension of hostilities, and some plan for making peace, of which many persons think the declaration will not be seen until it is calculated in London that the packets have arrived? And if unhappily the possibility of independence was allowed to be perceived as the first condition, is it at all doubtful that the second would be the formal engagement to unite with England against us? Then when we had become the laughing-stock of all Europe, a war of the most fatal nature, and America's failure to meet her engagements with all our merchants, would be the just reward of the slowness we should have exhibited in taking a decided part.

The worst, then, of all courses, now, is to remain without taking any, to take no initiative with America, and to wait

for the English to close all channels to us; which cannot fail to take place before a very short time.

The second course, which I look upon as the safest, would be to accept publicly the *treaty of alliance* proposed more than a year since by America, *with the right of fishing at the great bank, the mutual guarantee of the possessions of the contracting powers, the positive promise of mutual assistance or diversion in case of an attack being made on one side, or of hostilities being continued on the other; the whole accompanied by a secret plan for taking possession of the English islands, with a sacred engagement between the American, Spanish, and French powers, to establish afterwards a meridian for the English on the ocean between Europe and America, beyond which all their vessels should be declared subject to capture in peace or in war,* these turbulent neighbours having from this time no claims on the new continent.

It must be confessed, that as soon as the English learn that they can no longer have any hope of treating with a country which will have treated with us, they will instantly make war upon us with the greatest violence, declaring us to be the aggressors by this very treaty. But one war being as good as another, as it is now inevitable, the Americans, Spaniards, and French united, are more than sufficient to bring down this haughty nation if it should be insane enough to dare to attack us.

Another objection arises, which is of the greatest weight, and which I must not omit to answer, from the fact that the objector is the Count de Maurepas himself. It is to be feared, says this minister, that the American deputies will not have sufficiently extended or absolute powers for us to be able to treat with them in safety about so great an affair; or that their various private interests may lead them to divulge the secret before its conclusion; or that the Congress (the members of which may vary every instant), shaken by bribery, or by the intrigues of the English, may refuse to ratify

the treaty; or, if it ratifies it, that the nation itself, attracted towards England by the conformity of religion, language, constitution, and manners, and, above all, by the secret pleasure of seeing itself on an equality, and of marching side by side with the haughty step-mother who affected for so long a time to rule it—that this nation, I say, may soon find means to elude the conditions of the treaty. Then all that would remain to the king would be an equivocal alliance and a doubtful treaty balanced by a bloody and inevitable war.

To this I reply, that a mind of such consummate wisdom in weighing all the risks and advantages, cannot certainly have failed to perceive that, in a course determined by events, it is reasonable to leave something to fortune while paying court to it as much as possible, by making use of all the precautions which human prudence can employ in so important an affair; and I will indicate what these precautions should be when I have set forth the third course, which appears to me best suited to the king of France in this delicate juncture. This third course, the most noble, dignified of all—and the results of which may fulfil the objects of the second course, but without in any way committing the dignity of the king, or the faith he thinks due to existing treaties—would be to declare to the English in a good manifesto, which should be also communicated to all the potentates of Europe:—

"That the king of France, after having from delicacy and regard for England, long remained a passive and tranquil spectator of the war going on between the English and the Americans, to the great injury and detriment of the commerce of France; learning from the debates in the English Parliament, as well as from the success of the American arms, that in spite of the powerful efforts of the English during three successive campaigns, the course of events is at last snatching America from the yoke of England; learning also that the best intellects of the English nation agree in thinking and saying aloud in the two Houses, that the Americans must be imme-

diately recognised as independent, and treated with like friends, on a footing of equality; that some have even gone so far as to examine whether in this quarrel between two portions of the same empire, the old country has not been more rebellious to the common constitution than the new; that in the midst of these debates, and from the intelligence received every moment, one is forced to doubt whether the preparations of the new campaign are directed in good faith against America or against any other country which it might suit England to disturb;

"That the king, knowing too certainly that the English, under pretence of searching the merchant vessels of France, and examining into their relations with the continent of America, insult, annoy, torment her merchants and subjects without any respect either for the French flag, or for the sacred asylum of the anchorage of the French coasts; that they take advantage of their private quarrel, to levy unjust and vexatious customs on all nations to whom the ocean is free; that his Majesty sees with pain the French merchants, who have long been the sufferers from his concessions to England, in this condition of annoyance and anxiety, which is more grievous for his subjects than open war, while the maritime trade of his states is languishing beneath restrictions and political prohibitions on one side, and on the other, beneath the very severe inquisition with which the English visit all his enterprises; that this very attention to England having induced his Majesty, in spite of his position as a neutral power, to place the American privateer-owners in uncertainty regarding the security of their asylum in his ports, and also that of the vessels they might take there, this strictness, which lays the seeds of misunderstanding between two friendly nations, has already given some American privateer-owners the notion of taking possession of French vessels; that France has already suffered from these novel enterprises, which, with the resentment and reprisals they entail, may make ideas so unset-

tled, that it will soon be impossible to distinguish friends from enemies, and to know what nation is at war or at peace with us; that, moreover, his Majesty may fear with reason that the possible and presumedly proximate reunion of two such bellicose nations may turn against his interests, as the Americans, who have not ceased to solicit assistance from and alliance with France in an open manner, indignant at not having obtained them, may unite this resentment with the natural anxiety of the English; so that the result will be a common war on the part of these two nations against France, a war which will be the more disastrous for the latter, from the fact that the king would not have brought it upon him but for his constant attention to England, and his religious respect for existing treaties; that in this state of uncertainty and agitation, his Majesty, obliged by circumstances to decide instantly on some course, will always prefer, in accordance with his heart and dignity, the most noble and the most disinterested of all;

"That thus, without wishing to declare war against England, still less to make war against her; without declaring it according to the custom which has too odiously become established during this century; without even a wish to make the combination in any treaty prejudicial to the interests of the court of London, but only having regard to the sufferings and just representations of his faithful subjects who are engaged in maritime commerce, his Majesty contents himself at present, as a consequence of the neutrality he has always observed, *with declaring that he considers the Americans as independent, and means henceforth to regard them as such relative to their commerce with France, and that of France with them;* that he allows indiscriminately all his subjects to go and negotiate business in all the ports of America, as they do at present in those of England; to exchange the productions of the French manufactures for the natural products of those climates, in competition with all the merchants of Europe,

who take the productions of their countries there in large quantities. For if his Majesty thinks he ought to show some attentions to his neighbours in time of war, he also thinks his justice is interested in not allowing his subjects to suffer any longer in full peace, from privations and interdictions which no sovereign in Europe would wish to impose upon his own. That, in continuing to open his ports to the Americans, as in past time, his Majesty does not mean that the English should be deprived of the right of purchasing in them these same French productions, the trade in which is free to all nations which are not at war with us; that by this moderate conduct towards all persons, his Majesty thinks he is rendering to all what they have a right to hope from his justice and generosity; that with the view of exhibiting still more plainly the disinterested sentiments which animate him, his Majesty proposes his good offices to the two belligerent nations, so as to arrange, if possible, their differences.

"His Majesty declares, moreover, that he does not wish to trouble England or America to accept his good offices, and that he will not consider himself offended by the refusal of either or both; that if one of these two nations, inflated with success, or soured by losses, offers the least obstacle to freedom of commerce with its rival, then upon the first hostility to any French vessels of war or merchant vessels, his Majesty will consider himself free from having any regard for so unjust a nation, and will treat at once with the other, on such conditions that the latter will profit exclusively by all the advantages of its alliance and commerce. His Majesty declares, moreover, that he will at once make a point of repelling by force any insult offered to his flag."

The above is as nearly as possible the manifesto which I propose to the king's council. It is true, that as this document only extends the rights of the French neutrality, and establishes a perfect equality between the contending par-

ties, it may irritate the English without satisfying the Americans. To remain at this point is perhaps still to leave England the power of being beforehand with us, and offering to America this same independence, in consideration of a treaty of union of a very offensive character towards us.

Now, in this chaos of events, in this universal shock of so many conflicting interests, will not the Americans prefer those who offer them independence, with a treaty of union, to those who content themselves with acknowledging that they have been courageous and successful enough to gain their liberty? I should venture, then, while siding with the Count de Vergennes, to propose adding to the third course, the secret conditions of the second.

That is to say, that directly I declared America independent, I should secretly commence a treaty of alliance with her; and as this is the moment for replying to the Count de Maurepas' objection, and of curing him of his anxiety about the division of interests among the deputies, and the inconsistent nature of their powers, so as to procure all the safeguards of which such a thing is susceptible, I should not conclude this treaty in France with the deputation; but I should send off a faithful agent secretly, who, under the pretext of simply going to regulate the commercial rights of the two nations, would be specially charged to conclude with the Congress the particular conditions of this treaty, which will only be commenced in Europe, and that merely to satisfy the deputation. I confess that to gain over the general opinion in America, to counteract the effects of the bribery and intrigues of the English, to treat in a suitable manner for the interests of France, and to embody to the satisfaction of our government all the principal points in such a treaty, I must suppose that, leaving on one side all court influence, our ministers take great pains in selecting their agent, for the confidence placed in his zeal and his

capacity must be the only limits to his powers, at such a distance from the cabinet, and in such difficult circumstances.

With the agent carefully selected, this voyage quickly made, these powers judiciously confided, if the deputies from Congress, in France, are made to give an engagement in writing, that nothing shall be commenced with the English until the receipt of the first news from the French agent in America, it may be considered that the only remedy has been discovered for the evils which M. de Maurepas apprehends.

Directly, then, I declared the independence of the Americans, obtained the engagement from the deputation, and despatched my agent to America, I should commence by furnishing the shores of the ocean with from sixty to eighty thousand men, and I should let my navy assume the most formidable air and tone, so that the English might not doubt that I had taken my determination in earnest.

During this time I would do impossibilities, in order to free Portugal from its subjection to the English, even if I should have to incorporate it in the league which binds the house of Bourbon.

In Turkey, I would get up a war with the Russians, in order to occupy towards the East those whom the English would wish to draw towards the West. Or, if I thought I could do nothing with the Turks, I should let the Emperor* and Russia be secretly flattered into the belief that I would not make any opposition to the dismemberment of Turkey, in consideration of some compensation in the direction of Austria and Flanders; all means being good, provided they produce the isolation of the English and the indifference of the Russians towards them.†

* Of Austria, without doubt.

† This is the fantastic portion of Beaumarchais' Memorial; but the passage shows us how the situation in 1777 differed from that of the present day.

Finally, if to preserve an appearance of respect for treaties, I did not rebuild Dunkirk, the present position of which is the eternal shame of France, I should commence at least one port on the ocean, of such a nature, and so near to the English, that they might look upon the project of keeping them in check as an irrevocable determination.

I should cement in every form my friendship with America, whose guarantee can now alone preserve our colonies for us; and as the interests of this new people can never clash with ours, I should rely as much upon their engagements as I should mistrust every forced engagement on the part of England; and I should no longer neglect a single occasion of lowering this treacherous and furious neighbour, who, after having offered us so many insults, now that she is bursting with rage, exhibits more hatred against us than resentment against the Americans, who have deprived her of three quarters of her empire.

But, let us beware of spending in deliberation the single moment that remains to us for action, and of passing our time in always saying "It is too soon," until we are obliged to exclaim with grief, "Oh heavens, it is too late!"

CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

No. 13 (page 187.)

Letter from Honoré Ganteaume, afterwards Admiral to Beaumarchais.

Sir,—Too jealous of serving you, and resolved to be entirely subject to your wishes, I did not venture to disobey the orders given to me by M. de Montieu, considering them as coming from you, to embark on board the "Fier Roderigue," in spite of a presentiment I had that I should meet with everything disagreeable. I shall not conceal from you, however, that I exhibited a great repugnance to it before M. de

Montieu, but he was already too much prejudiced against me, doubtless by M. Montaut,* to deign to listen and attend to my reasons. For this reason I should not dare to hesitate a single instant about informing you of the matter, and in making you acquainted with the misfortune I am experiencing. I call it a misfortune, as I find myself deprived by M. Montaut's policy of any opportunity of proving to you my zeal and gratitude. He has just appointed me to the most inactive post there is in a ship, that of prize captain, and not satisfied with thus making it impossible for me to render my services of value, he has also deprived me of all the prerogatives attached to the grade he has given me. I am here entirely as a supernumerary, or, more properly speaking, have nothing to do with the vessel. I had this post because it was necessary for me to have one, but with it no more respect, and even less distinction, than if I had been commander of a boat, as I was at the beginning, and this doubtless because you have seemed inclined to honour me with your patronage.

Besides, M. Montaut remembers that I was a sailor under him, and although I gave him satisfaction during the voyage, I incurred his anger by writing against his severity on my return. . . . . .

However, notwithstanding any prejudice M. Montaut may have against me, I hope to oblige him to do me justice at the end of this voyage. Guided by my wish to prove my zeal and devotion, I intend to overcome all difficulties. I hope you will kindly oblige me on my return by making inquiries about my conduct of M. Montaut, and the thought that the information you receive will be favourable sustains me, and serves me in lieu of happiness.

I have the honour to be, with the greatest respect and gratitude, Yours, &c.,

H. GANTEAUME.

Roads of Brest, April 3, 1779.

* The captain of Beaumarchais' vessel.

No. 14 (page 200.)

Philadelphia, September 3.

Dear Sir,—I have forgotten my French so much since my arrival here, although I have not forgotten my French friends, that I do not dare to write to you in that language.

I have written twice lately to you about your affairs, so that I have the pleasure of repeating to you that the Congress begins to feel its want of attention towards you, and with what easy credulity it has received the base and malicious insinuations of the others; which I really think would never have had any weight if Ducoudray had not at first spread notions altogether to your prejudice. I cannot tell you whether this unhappy nation will be in a position at present to satisfy your just demands, but I am sure it will adopt some plan for arranging this affair, so that it may find the means of paying at a future period what its present inability alone prevents it from liquidating now; and upon this understanding the Congress, as I hope and think, will express publicly to you its sentiments of gratitude for your generous conduct.

I have endeavoured with all my might to convince my compatriots of the injustice and ingratitude with which you were treated before the arrival of M. Deane, and I flatter myself I have had some success; he has made similar efforts, so that justice, although slow, will resume its sway. I wish, for the honour of my compatriots, that we never had any occasion to make such representations to them.

M. de Francy is in Virginia, and is acting in your behalf sincerely and indefatigably; I expect him soon in this town. Your nephew has passed some weeks with me, but he is ordered with his general to join the army under the orders of General Sullivan. He is a brave young man, and on acquaintance is much liked; he has all the vivacity of his age, and is anxious to distinguish himself. General Conway

assured me that he behaved like a little hero at the battle of Brandywine. I take the liberty of entering into these details because I know they will please his mamma, for bravery was always a powerful recommendation with the fair sex, and she must be charmed to find so much of it in her son.

Our arrangements for foreign affairs are not yet terminated; accordingly, I do not know whether I shall be continued in my present place of secretary of embassy at your court, being at three thousand miles distance from it, or whether I shall be employed in some fresh department.

Dr. Franklin will certainly be continued at the Court of Versailles, and a blow will also very certainly be dealt so as to make the Lees fall back quietly into the obscurity from which they were endeavouring to raise themselves; but whether that be effected or not is not yet quite certain; we have so many intrigues and cabals here, that you and our friends suffer from them on the other continent; why should we not have them, considering that we are sovereign states, and that we are friends and allies of Louis XVI?

Our government machine being only such as it was invented, we have some points of perfection to join to it, and some wheels to add before it can go on smoothly and with success, as we should wish. In the meanwhile we are going forward slowly, and sometimes we roll over the stones roughly enough, God knows.

I beg you to believe me for ever yours,

W. CARMICHAEL.

No. 15 (page 237).

Beaumarchais a Financier.—A Note of his on the Bank of Discount.

MY OPINION.

If I clearly understand the question submitted to the deliberation of the commissioners, the point is to lay before the

Controller-General the best rule for establishing a just proportion between the amount of each dividend, and the amount of funds in reserve. My opinion is, that in every affair in shares every sudden augmentation in the value of the dividend is an evil, because a great movement in advance prognosticates one in the contrary direction. It is generally known that the mass of affairs on which discount takes place in Paris cannot increase from one half year to another so as to raise the dividend from 130 to 212 livres, unless by means of some forced operation. And if that, in one half year so extraordinary an increase in discount should be produced, it can only be momentary, because it only proceeds, like that of the last half year, 1784, from the sudden selling and reselling of shares, which will no longer take place as soon as the hope of gaining largely by them has ceased. Since the establishment of the Bank of Discount, it must be remarked that the dividend has never decreased, owing to the care which has been taken only to augment it gradually, the increase of the reserved funds being always preferred to that of the dividend. In the first six months of 1783, the dividend was only raised to 130 livres, although the mass of the discount was at least as large as that of the last six months of 1784, and the catastrophe of the second six months of 1783 only shows how right it was not to force the dividend momentarily.

There is no rule of proportion, then, more sure according to me, than that given in Article 3 of the Decree of the Council of January 12, 1783; the reserve fund of 2,500,000 livres is therein recommended. This fund ought to be completed before everything else, then augmented if possible, but augmented incessantly by all the increase that takes place each half year in the amount of the discount, minus the sums employed in gradually and moderately augmenting the dividend, so that if some losses or a momentary diminution in the affairs of the bank took place, it would not be necessary to

diminish the forthcoming dividend; but so that, on the contrary, it might be kept up by taking as much as possible from the reserve without entering upon the fund of 2,500,000 livres, which ought to be the lowest permanent sum of the reserved funds for insuring the validity of the shares. Their temporary speculations may lose some vigour by this arrangement, but the confidence established by this method will always keep up its high value.

No. 16 (page 256).

Denunciation to the Parliament of the Subscription to the Works of Voltaire.

Ululate et clamate. Jer., chap. 34.

Such are the exclamations, gentlemen, addressed to all virtuous men by the country, religion, and morals. I venture now to be their interpreter, and to denounce the most revolting enterprise to the entire body of magistrates. If its rash authors have not feared to raise the indignation of every honest heart, if they have been able to persuade themselves that everything will not be opposed to this enterprise, and that they will succeed in their project, they must have reckoned on the most universal depravation; they must have thought the entire body of the nation so gangrened, its mind so corrupted, its heart so withered, that now everything could be ventured, everything undertaken, everything executed.

They are announcing publicly, and with the greatest ostentation, a subscription for the entire works of Voltaire; and in this edition it is proposed to unite both the works of which he acknowledged the authorship, those which he circulated surreptitiously, denying that he was the author, and those which, from the fear they inspired him with, he kept shut up in his portfolio. It is this collection of impiety, infamy, and obscenity which all Europe is invited to procure, adorned, as it

is to be, by the richest type and the most elegant engravings, and all possible typographic magnificence.

Thus in one single body all these separate members are to be collected, so that all the poison may be put together, and that nothing may escape contagion; so that impiety may find arms in the attacks directed against religion; libertinism, attraction in the most obscene paintings; the spirit of independence, a support in the maxims most fitted for raising it up against authority.

The frightful abuse which Voltaire has made of his talents, is sufficiently known; and the impiety of his prose, and the disgraceful nature of his poetry, are known only too well. But as if the attacks against all true principles were not sufficiently powerful separately, it is wished to unite them all together, so as to overturn at once religion, morals, and society; to sever all the ties which attach men to their superiors and their equals.

Is there, in fact, one single object, however sacred, however worthy of respect, which he has not, like the fabulous harpies, defiled by his touch! In religion, there is nothing which his blasphemies have not profaned; books, saints, dogmas, morals, ministry, nothing has been spared. Patriarchs, prophets, martyrs, the seers of the two Testaments, the great men of all centuries, the most authentic actions, everything in religion, even to its Founder, in passing under the brush of this ill-omened painter, has received the colours most calculated for inspiring ridicule, so that it never had a more inconsiderate, and at the same time a more dangerous enemy.

The other writers who have attacked revelation—who have wished to establish materialism, to do away with the spirituality and immortality of the soul—have employed metaphysical and subtle reasoning, which was not likely to make much impression on the multitude. Voltaire took another way. Knowing the power of ridicule, he employed that alone, because it requires no examination, and conquers all

superficial minds. He cares little whether his assertions are absurd, his sophisms puerile, his reasoning contradictory; he knows that the greater number of readers neither examine nor dispute anything; that everything which frees from terror, a religion which is *gênante* to the passions, is received with avidity and loudly applauded, and increases the number of proselytes. This was the end he wished for, and the road he took in order to attain it. If he vomited blasphemy, it was turned into raillery; if he gave utterance to the most impious things, they were sharpened with satire; if he wished to overthrow the most certain doctrines, he did it by clothing them with ridicule; if he did away with all—souls, minds, punishments, and future rewards, it was not by denying their existence, but by loading them with sarcasm and irony; in a word, if he attacks morality, doctrine, and Scripture, he is careful not to use reasoning—the weakness of it would be discovered—but he turns all into ridicule; he raises a laugh; and this seductive manner pleases, because it amuses, and because it is easier for voluptuous men to despise a religion which inconveniences them, than to examine whether it has any foundation for its precepts and threats.

And all this is clothed in the most enchanting colours; his blasphemy does not seem atrocious because it is so brilliant; he only seizes the outward parts, but he paints them in the most graceful manner, and this wild project which he himself did not dissimulate to be the rival of the Founder of Christianity, this splendid project which flattered his pride, the charms of which he had tried in his early youth in his first productions, he continued in the same manner and the same way. He knew well that religion was built on a rock which for nearly two thousand years had sustained the most violent shocks, and that any serious attacks from him would be but as the efforts of a pigmy. What did he do? He took to uttering sarcasms, to turn it cunningly into ridicule in prose, to blaspheme in pretty verses, and he succeeded with

thoughtless and frivolous people, with *petits-maîtres* for whom this sufficed, with women who thought they showed their sense by jeering at what had always been respected, with those young people who had given themselves up to a life of pleasure, and whose causes for remorse he removed. And these young people will form the present generation, replaced by one still more depraved, if a powerful and redoubtable hand does not speedily stop this torrent.

It will be easily understood that when insulting religion Voltaire did not respect morality; it was indeed solely for the purpose of breaking through the barriers which defend it that he wished to overthrow a religion which is its safest guard. If it had only consisted of speculative doctrines which were to be believed, and of incomprehensible mysteries instead of strict maxims which condemned voluptuousness, this impious man would never have thought of disputing its divinity. But in depriving religion of its holiness, he wished to free licentious men from the burden which its menaces and threats of punishment laid on them, and to cause his infamous productions to be received with avidity, those productions in which libertinism of mind and corruption of heart seem to concert to bring together the most obscene maxims, the vilest paintings, and all which the greatest licentiousness could imagine.

His poems were necessarily such as to do away with any remains of honesty and modesty, since in an age when all was closed, no one ever dared to produce these but in secret, and since the author himself was always eager to deny them as soon as they were attributed to him. Doubtless no one was ever duped by these conventional untruths, but it was at least an unexpected proof of the horror which such productions must have inspired.

Nevertheless, these are the works which are offered with scandalous publicity. Readers of all classes are to be infected by this poison prepared for the greedy imprudence and for

rash thoughtlessness of youth, which is but too eager to swallow it. There is not a father amongst you who would not snatch these abominable poems from the hands of his children; how then could you suffer that they should be honoured, and that the splendour in which they are clothed should become an enchanting lure for those whom these isolated poems have not yet perverted?

Ought not so long and so fatal an experience make you hasten to prevent with the most inflexible severity these terrible things, and the results occasioned by them? Ought you to wait till all is lost, till the whole of their morality is destroyed before trying to prevent it. We already hear complaints that our youths, hating restraint, detest all serious work; that in those positions which are most devoted to reserve and strict morality, they hardly acknowledge any law; that even paternal authority is not able to repress them; that what was before only idleness and giddiness has become licentiousness and depravity; that even the sex where modesty and virtue were intended to embellish the gifts of nature, affects a tone of liberty which almost reaches that of licentiousness and effrontery. Now, inquire the reason from those who are most acquainted with society—they will tell you that the works of Voltaire alone have formed this abyss; that the seduction of their style and the temptation of their sensuality have made them circulate everywhere; that it is by them alone that women have become instigated to an acquaintance with impiety and libertinism, sacrificing to reading these books the time destined for good works; that they have penetrated even to the workshops of artisans, and beneath the cottage of the labourer, and that soon nothing will escape this torrent which devastates everything in its passage, the ravages of this scourge which destroys all true principles and all honourable sentiments.

If to such great, such elevated interests, I wish to join those of the magistracy, insulted and vilified in Voltaire's

writings, the latter alone should suffice to stop the progress of an edition which is to transmit these insults to the most distant posterity. Under pretence of discussing the decisions of sovereign courts, and of examining their justice, this author, who had not even the knowledge indispensable for this discussion, permits himself with unheard of levity to utter the most unfounded censure: this is not all—he makes it an opportunity for attacking the magistrates, for calumniating their motives, and, according to his ordinary process, for spreading the varnish of his ridicule over those whom he wishes to render contemptible. What must result from this? That the disputes which were made the pretext for his sarcasms will be forgotten; both the facts and the unimportant interests of the individuals will be soon lost sight of, but the impression will remain: the respect due to the tribunals, which alone keeps up that which is due to their decisions, will disappear; each citizen will think himself at liberty, in imitation of this rash satirist, to cite you before his own private tribunal, and to annul your judgments; and from this private censorship will be formed a public opinion of contempt, that is to say, the most fatal thing possible for public order and private tranquillity.

Shall I tell you, gentlemen, you have not been sufficiently alarmed by the tragic events which were known to be occasioned by the impious and licentious works of Voltaire. That young man of Abbeville, whose blasphemies and crimes made him condemned to death, confessed that the reading of Voltaire alone had brought him to the scaffold. Those young soldiers who some years since resolved in cold blood on the most frightful suicide, testified in their wills that they had been inspired in this calm madness by the writings of Voltaire. What consequences should you not have drawn from these confessions? What prompt, efficacious, strong measures should you not have taken for stifling works which could engender such monsters? Do you not see how power-

less have been the feeble precautions you have taken for stopping the ravages of which only the smallest portion are known (because the others are inclosed in the bosoms of families, reduced to the necessity of groaning over them in silence). Many of these writings of Voltaire have been branded by your decisions; some have even been condemned to the flames; and nevertheless, in spite of this judicial and public reprobation, they have been reproduced: they are announced as forming part of this general collection; and you would look on quietly while they proclaimed publicly, with audacious ostentation, the little importance they attach to your decisions, to public decency, to the disapprobation of the most healthy part of the nation! You would suffer that beneath your very eyes, contemptible men, who do not even dare to show themselves, should take such efficacious measures for preserving the smallest shades from the portfolio of their hero, so that nothing may be lost of the disgusting impieties and the obscene filth with which he polluted his pen! You know, gentlemen, like those rapid rivers which, carrying along with them the strange and impure matters which have become mixed up in them, deposit them here and there on the bank, and only bear to the sea the tribute of their waters; the admirable art which was invented for giving eternity to the productions of the human mind, after taking up in a passing way useless and frivolous works, abandons them generally in its course, and only transmits constantly to posterity such works as are useful to the progress of the sciences and arts. But, as if the undertakers of the collection we are denouncing feared this natural course of the printing-press, they hasten to collect everything which can insure the perpetuity of all these infectious works which they have accumulated; they take all possible precautions, so that by giving them the value without limits, they may render them valuable and assist their preservation.

Render useless, then, this fatal conspiracy to religion and society; show the same solicitude, the same vigour in stifling these poisons of the mind, which you have shown in stopping the course of that contagion which threatened our fortunes and our lives. Men who are avaricious rather than malicious, had discovered in a plant, which was almost unknown, a fatal virtue, the more dangerous in proportion as its use was more easy, for enabling citizens to be sent to sleep and robbed. You have felt the terrible consequences of this kind of robbery, which, being committed without violence, left scarcely any traces; you thought you ought to punish the first attempts by chastisement sufficiently rigorous to inspire a salutary terror. Every one understood that this severity, which at first might have appeared excessive, had been necessary. Be your own models; do not confine yourself to preventing the effects of this criminal subscription; find in your wisdom the means necessary for stifling, if possible, these germs of corruption which are poisoning every heart, for preventing the action of this leaven, which has been fermenting too long, and which is ready to gangrene the entire mass of the nation, before sending back into the darkness of oblivion works which should never have emerged from it.

We do not propose to you as a remedy, the just severity of your predecessors in the century which is ridiculously philosophical—in which all that is known of virtue is a cruel tolerance; this severity would be looked upon as barbarous; but at least it is allowable to place it before your eyes. Impious and licentious authors had composed verses against the "honour of God and of public virtue."* The court condemned them to the severest punishment of the law, as guilty of treason against God, and as being, from their system, more fatal to social order than poisoners and incendiaries. It extended the punishment pronounced against the authors,

* Théophile Berthelot, 1623.

to those who should be found with the book in their possession, and the booksellers were ordered to be arrested and prosecuted with all the rigour of the law. May this example at least convince you that there are cases in which courts ought, with a view of stopping the communication of a deadly epidemic, to display all the rigour of the power intrusted to them by the prince; and that religion, morals, the interests of the state itself require it sometimes, from the magistrates, who know that those who sap the foundations of religion, banish all virtue, establish the reign of vice, annihilate all motives of dependence, and break all the bonds of society.

March 10, 1781.

Note sent by Beaumarchais to the Foreign Journals, in reply to the preceding Paper.

April 29, 1781.

Sir,—It has been printed in several foreign journals, that M. Caron de Beaumarchais, as correspondent at Paris of the Literary and Typographical Society, which is printing in Germany the works of Voltaire, has been denounced by a magistrate to the Parliament. You are earnestly requested to be kind enough to disabuse the public of its false impression, by printing my letter.

This is what must have furnished the pretext for so dull a lie to the Parisian newsmongers. Some obscure barber has clandestinely had printed the most stupid production, under the title of "Denunciation to the Parliament of the Subscription for Voltaire," with the epigraph "Ululate et clamate"—howl and bark, in which, in the midst of a thousand barkings, it can be read that "*M. de Voltaire painted atrocities with the most graceful brush; that he jested elegantly in prose, and blasphemed in pretty verses; that he succeeded with petit-*

maîtres, and women of pretension, who thought themselves witty . . . . . That in this century, which is ridiculously philosophical, no virtue is known, but a cruel tolerance." (To the very great regret of the author), &c.

This outburst of an unknown lout, against a foreign society occupied with a superb work, has been received as it deserved, with the most profound contempt. And the "cruel tolerance of this century, which is ridiculously philosophical," is the only thing that prevents M. de Beaumarchais from finding out and prosecuting the poor authors of the ridiculous and false announcement in the journals, as doubtless some money was given them to subsist with, on condition of inserting it in their journals.

END OF VOL. III.

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